

1 Timothy 5:1-2

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“Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but *rather* appeal to *him* as a father, *to* the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, *and* the younger women as sisters, in all purity.”

Introduction

This morning, we begin this section (in 1 Timothy, chapter 5) that deals primarily with a particular group and then, later with other groups. We begin with this concept of the widows that the Lord had in His sovereignty inspired such a long section on the protection, care of, and administration of widows. You would think how odd that is and we will get to why that is the case in the weeks to come. There's a lot to be said about that and I think that there is a lot that the church has forgotten by way of caring for its own members. In the later part of this chapter, we'll talk about how to treat and how to deal with elders, themselves; meaning those who are officers in the church, those who shepherd and guide. But for now, I just want to take a look at the first two verses of chapter 5. Those two verses act as a bridge the things that Timothy is commanded to do how he is to do it.

The title of the message this morning is “How to minister to the family of God.” I thought the first two verses would be particularly appropriate to us in the New Year; a time when we all make resolutions, when we all have goals for ourselves. It's the best time of year for us to consider carefully how we might participate more in the body of Christ and in worshipping and ministering to the living God in a way that honors Him through Christ—His body. So why don't we ask the Lord to bless this time and begin our time around the Word of God this morning.

Heavenly Father,

We thank You for Your blessing. We thank You for the Word of God. We thank You that we might gather together as brothers and sisters in the Lord; that we might sing out Your praise, think of the greatness of our God, and that we might for a moment Lord, just reflect upon another year that begins.

Another year, another opportunity for us, Lord, to live for Your glory. And Lord, I pray that if nothing else that this coming year, we might have a deepened sense of the need for humility and graciousness; the need to go and serve and make a difference in the family of Christ and in the world; that we might focus our hearts and attention to genuinely becoming more sanctified and more delighted in the things of Christ and more enthralled by His grace and mercy.

Lord, there are so many things for us to learn and Lord, as we look at the Word this morning, may it encourage us; may it encourage us to just desire, to participate more; to do more, to make a difference in each other's lives.

Give us practical wisdom as it is laid out for us here in this instruction to young Timothy and may we Lord, as we listen in the background to this teacher, this great apostle Paul as he gives instruction to this young minister, Timothy; may we, in the background, understand that there is an application for us as well, to participate, to make sure that we are involved in the sanctifying process of all the members of the body of Christ.

And may that be our delight Lord. May that be our charge and may this year particularly be focused upon that mandate in our lives; that we might delight in our God and that we might do something according to His service and His glory.

*We pray these things in Jesus' name,
Amen.*

Review: Paul's Purpose in 1 Timothy

Before we come to this particular portion in the epistle to Timothy, let me recap the historical development so we know what's going on here. Remember that Paul had left Timothy behind in Ephesus. In fact, turn a page over to look at chapter 1 so we can know exactly what's going on. In verse 3, Paul gives exactly the reason why he's writing. In 1 Timothy 1:3 he says, "As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus in order that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines."

So, one of the primary reasons Timothy is left there is that he needs to re-instruct those that are teaching false doctrines and false teachings in the church. Verse 4 goes on to say, "nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith." Immediately, in the beginning of the letter there's a historical situation in which there were men that were erring in truth. It's wrong to say that they are erring in truth. They're actually erring by *not* speaking the truth. They were dwelling on mythologies, genealogies, whatever these things were; apparently, they were Old Testament ideas that they had taken and ran with. We had said that cults are capable of such things. They take an idea and they exasperate it. They blow it up to the point that it becomes a central doctrine.

Paul is saying, "Timothy, fix these guys! Instruct them in what is truth and right." Later on in 1 Timothy 1:6, he says that these men are "straying from these things, they've turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanted to be teachers of the law." But they don't understand what they're talking about, the things that they make confident assertions about. They don't know what they're doing. So here's a strong admonition: correct these erring elders among that church in Ephesus. Timothy corrects even these men that think themselves to be in positions of authority.

And then turn over back to chapter four. We see that even in chapter 4, Timothy has been given these strong admonitions to the task that is before him. 1 Timothy 4:6 says, "point out these things to the brethren," (i.e. all these doctrinal truths, point them out to the brethren). 1 Timothy 4:11 says, "Prescribe and teach these things." 1 Timothy 4:12 says, "Let no one look down on your youthfulness." In other words, there were older men who were looking down at Timothy. Remember, we said the concept of "looking down" literally meant "to disdain?" They're saying, "What do you know? You don't know anything." Paul is saying, "Don't let them disdain you, but instead by example and by teaching, instruct them back to the truth."

So here you have a young guy, Timothy and by young, he was basically my age in his 30s (and that's very young)! That was considered young at that time. The concept of youth was anyone under 40 and Timothy fit that mold. Our best guess is that he was in his mid-thirties (so he would be like your pastors here—young and in charge). Because of his age, there was this issue with his youthfulness. When you have a young man whose given this heavy charge—to fix doctrine in the church, to correct the elders, to find out what is going with this and make sure that these guys are growing in sanctification and to tell them what is true in order to bring them back to the things of the Lord—that is a heavy responsibility for young men to handle.

As a result, what might happen in this situation? There are a couple things:

- 1) Timothy might shrink back. He might become timid and we have a sense of that in both 1 and 2 Timothy, where Paul is saying don't stop preaching, don't stop doing the admonition, continue and do the work. God hasn't given us a spirit of timidity, go out there and do what He has commanded you to do. So, he could easily become timid.
- 2) He could also, on the other hand, become heavy-handed. He could be "over-the-top." That would be natural for a young man who's given all this responsibility, who has to change all of these errors and basically become this tyrant of an individual who brings it down sharply.

How to Minister: A Balance of Truth and Graciousness

What we have in 1 Timothy 5:1-2 is a reminder from Paul that we need to balance the truth that you are bringing with graciousness; and where grace and truth coexist, you understand your charge and you do exactly what God would desire for you to do.

There is this good book if you'd like to read it. It's a small one by Randy Alcorn called *Grace and Truth Paradox*. In it, Alcorn talks about John 1:1-14 which is probably a portion of Scripture that many of you have memorized. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God... then the Word became flesh and He dwelt among us, we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father." We usually stop right there (at least in our theology) and we forget the rest of it: "that He was full of grace and truth." If you think about it (and I think Alcorn says it well), there is this two-pronged Christ-likeness test to see if are you genuinely like Jesus Christ: Are you full of grace and are you full of truth?

If you have truth without grace, then you tend to emphasize the things we are doing wrong. You talk critically about different issues and you're good at bringing what the Scriptures would have us to do. But, you're not really gracious on a personal level.

If you emphasize grace without truth, you tend to basically emphasize forgiveness, being gracious, being nice and

generous and bringing everyone in and then sometimes the result is that you stop talking about the concept of sin and you may even feel awkward about the truth that makes people uncomfortable.

What did Jesus Christ do? What did He exemplify? He exemplified both of these things. Indeed, our Savior was both full of grace and truth. Was it not the sinners among them that could come to Him, sit around Him at the same table and ask Him questions that pertained to life and eternal life? At the same time, did He not make it explicit in every circumstance that there is only one way to salvation? There's only one truth and that is this: sin must be repented of in order to find the grace of God. All of these wonderful teachings are always a balance of grace and truth. And we have that as the background of these two verses here in [1 Timothy 5:1-2](#):

“Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity.”

Now, there are four groups that are being developed here that we are to interact with: the older men, the younger men, the older women, and the younger women. To all of these, there is only one command that is given and that is to Timothy in this particular context. The command is given in the negative (what he's not supposed to do) and then in the positive (what he is supposed to do). And he gives us a sense of keeping the centrality of truth but doing it in a gracious manner; becoming men, becoming women, becoming ministers like Jesus Christ, Himself—full of grace and truth.

I like this particular saying that Randy Alcorn has in his book. It says, “Lord, make the bad people good and the good people nice.” It was from a little girl's prayer. I thought it was kind of cute that there's a little girl that understood that often bad people needed to become good, but that good people really need to become nice.

Sometimes, that is an issue for us at IBC. We are a church that stands on the truth. Your pastors come from a background where we all emphasize the truth and God bless the institutions of The Master's Seminary and The Master's College. I'm glad for that and I love them for that. But, we are young men and if we're not careful, truth becomes a battering ram instead of the healing salve that it's supposed to be. We need to be careful about that.

Paul is addressing Timothy with all of these things, to charge him to change all of these errors, to change all of these doctrines. Here is what he says: First, this is what you don't do. **“Do not sharply rebuke an older man.”** On the flip side, you need to **“appeal to him as a father.”** Do not sharply rebuke, but instead, do the opposite which is to appeal to him in encouragement.

The Greek term *epipleōso* (ἐπιπλήσσω) for this idea to **“not sharply rebuke”** is almost a violent term. In fact, A.T. Robertson (Greek New Testament scholar) says that originally in the classical Greek it meant to “strike down upon.” It meant to really hit someone. If we could translate it into more colloquial English, it would mean “to beat down.” He's saying don't beat down the elders or the elderly. Instead, as you approach an older man (or woman) and it is an issue of sin that you confront them, you have to do it in such a way that you are not beating them down.

This same term took on a more figurative meaning for the spoken kind of reprimand that was extremely harsh and the New American Standard (NASB) translation adds in the word **“sharply”** to accentuate this idea—that it's not just the idea of rebuking. But, it's not a condemnation against bringing out to light truth. Understand that. The Scriptures do not encourage us to say, “Well, you're old so you can sin. You're so close to the kingdom gates that you could just sin and hopefully we'll see you in heaven.” No, we are to go out and rebuke those that need to be reprovved, but here, the particular word is not our normal word for rebuke, but it is to **“sharply rebuke,”** to browbeat, to come with such harshness of words as to injure someone.

Paul's warning is against severity in the pursuit of ministry. Again, for a young man with such a heavy charge, left by himself on an island, it is Timothy against these erring elders, against these ladies that have taken improper positions in the church, against people that are saying that he's just too young; against the tide of all of this, to this young man Paul essentially asks Timothy to not “fly off the handle.” Don't come off ungraciously. Be careful not to browbeat anybody. We need to be Christ-like. We need to be most gracious and we need to bring the full impact of truth. He says instead of this, the contrast is that we ought to encourage or to appeal.

The term for **“appeal”** is *parakaleō* (παρακαλέω). It is quite a loaded term actually. It's a very common word that we often translate our New Testament for “encouragement” from an associated word *paraklētos* (παρακλήτοζ) who is the Helper, the Holy Spirit, Himself, in John 14:16. And sometimes you can translate that idea of comforting and the idea of admonishment, so that it has a wide range in terms of its meaning and usage. However, we most often just translate it as “encouragement.” Let's look at some of the better translations and see how they translate these words.

The NASB says **“appeal to”** and I think they're trying to capture (and I think appropriately so) this idea that instead of browbeating them, instead of saying you're dumb, you're in sin, you need to repent—instead of that, you are to come alongside them and appeal to them and say “I urge you to do this. Would you consider doing these things?”

The New King James (NKJ) has a similar translation. They choose the word “exhort” and it too, means to come alongside and say in like manner “We need to do this. I'm prodding you towards this end.” And this idea of exhortation or appeal captures properly that sense of admonishment, the burden of necessity. It's the idea of the importance of this particular correction and it has the nuance of saying, “We've really got to prod each other on towards this thing.” It captures that

well. What it lacks however (at least in our English), is something by way of the sense of comfort.

The English Standard Version (ESV) translates this particular word “encourage” and that’s a good translation. If it is encouragement, then you get that sense of comfort; that you’re trying to encourage somebody along; that you’re trying to prod them along by putting your arm around them and walking together with them. That’s beautiful. That’s excellent.

The unfortunate thing with the word “encouragement” in our English is that it’s just filled with this notion that it’s just verbal affirmation. If we talk about stuff and I say “Hey, that person’s really encouraging.” What’s the first thing that comes to mind? That he is sanctifying to me? No, you think that that person says really nice things all the time. It’s like when your 3rd grade teacher used to always put on your papers “good work” and “good job” and “excellent.” Sometimes they just have a little stamp. And you’re encouraged. We think it’s just verbal affirmation, but that’s not the idea of it. It’s both this idea and exhortation put into one concept.

That is by far the most difficult thing in ministry. I would hope that as a result of our time together this morning and as you reflect upon the year that is to come, that you would desire to participate more fully in just the ministry of the gospel and just desiring to do more for the Lord. But even as you’re considering those things and what you might be able to do, the most difficult task in any kind of ministry, in any kind of service to the Lord, is dealing with people. And dealing with people in way of their sin in particular, is very difficult for a minister.

Let’s look at how the term for “**appeal**” or **parakaleō** is used in the earlier part of 1 Timothy 1:3. We read earlier that Paul “urged” (**parakaleō**) Timothy to remain on at Ephesus. In 1 Timothy 4:13 he says: “*Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and (**parakaleō**) and teaching.*” In Titus 2:6, he says, “*Likewise urge (**parakaleō**) the young men to be sensible.*”

There’s this sense of urging, begging, exhorting, encouraging, enabling, appealing—all of that stuff wrapped together in this one excellent concept. It speaks of taking truth and applying it in such a way that is so gracious that some may reject it, but they will be rejecting the truth. Some may accept it, but they’ll be accepting it because the graciousness in which the truth was delivered. That’s exactly what we ought to aim for.

Again, going back to Alcorn’s book, he makes a good statement in there:

“There’s something wrong with our church if all nonbelievers hate us. If all nonbelievers hate us something’s wrong with your church. If all nonbelievers like us, there’s something wrong with the church.”

If there’s a good balance of grace and truth, it should appeal to some, but not enough for everyone; so that only those that are called really come, really consider and contemplate sin and are willing to deal with it. We shouldn’t backtrack on the truth for the sake of graciousness. Neither should we forget graciousness because the truth is so important. Both of those things make for a true and excellent ministry. That’s how to minister.

The particular groups that Paul addresses are the older men, older women, younger men, and then, the younger women. In fact, he divides them up by gender between verse 1 and verse 2. We’ll combine them so that we can get the sense of both of them together.

How to Minister to Older Men & Women (vv. 1-2)

“Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but *rather* appeal to *him* as a father, *to* the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, *and* the younger women as sisters, in all purity.”

The Greek term here for “**older man**” is **presbuteros** (πρεσβύτερος) or “presbytery.” Does that word sound familiar? The same word used in verse 1 for the older man or elderly man is also used (in the feminine version) in verse 2 for the older women. The term “presbytery” or **presbuteros** can be used either for the office of the overseer (i.e. the elders in the church) or for someone that is elderly or someone older than us.

Clearly, that’s the implication here because Paul is saying to Timothy to treat them as if they were his father, as if they were his mother. You are to treat them in such a way that you don’t put them at a distance. Isn’t it curious that in these two verses where Paul’s trying to address the how-to’s of ministry to Timothy, he talks about ministering to individual groups by way of using basic, familial relationships. The older men are like your fathers, older women are like your mothers; the younger men and younger women—your brothers and sisters.

There is this concept of family that the Lord had desired from the outset for the church. For example, look at Mark 3. Jesus’ mother and his half-brothers arrive and then the people say, “Hey, Your mother and brothers are here.” Jesus looks around at the disciples gathered there and says, “Behold, here are My brothers. Here are My sisters.” Is He doing that as a backhanded insult against Mary and His half-brothers? No, He’s doing that to say (spiritually speaking) “Here is the family of God.

This is why the concept of taking care of the widow is so important. Think about the historical context here. Imagine this scenario for men: God has not blessed you and your spouse with children and you have no extended family. You're old enough that all of your friends have basically gone to be with the Lord or are just gone. You live in a time and situation where you don't just go out and get work. Whatever you have is all you have. You don't have anyone else to depend on. There's no extended family. Now, imagine your health is failing and you look to your wife whose health is still fairly good and you wonder, "What will become of her if I die? What's going to happen to her?" In that time and society, what normally happened to widows? They begged on the streets until they die. That's usually what happened. Whatever she has, she sells off little by little so that she can eat and survive. It is a bad road and it is more hopeful for her that she would die fairly quickly from the moment her husband passes away. That is a genuine widow.

Why discuss that in the concept of the church? In fact, why spend 14 to 16 verses on this idea? Because the church needs to care for them as if they were their mothers. These elderly men as if they were their fathers. We are to be like this family that cares for one another and really takes care of those who have genuine needs. God is the Father to the fatherless in the Old Testament and He's still that in the New Testament. He cares for those who cannot care for themselves.

If you ever want to study something interesting, study the concept of widows and orphans and you'll find that throughout the Scriptures that God constantly proclaiming Himself as their Defender. In fact, you can even say their Avenger; that He brings violence upon those who would prey upon orphans and widows. There's no one—no one—who cares for orphans and widows like our God. As a result, should not the church of Jesus Christ, His Body, be an extension of that type of care and love? That's why that becomes such a prominent thing; that's why it's such an important thing. There is this sense of family that develops when we're talking about how to deal with one another and the sense of family controls how we interact, even in the conviction of sin: how we confront and rebuke and challenge each other towards righteousness. We are to treat the older men and women as our fathers and mothers.

It shouldn't sound unusual at all to hear about the idea of honoring fathers and mothers. It's the 4th commandment. In fact, in the list of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) it's not only the 4th commandment, but it is the first commandment dealing with our responsibility to other human beings. The first three are all about God; about having no other god, no graven images, and keeping the Sabbath. It's all about the worship of God. After those commandments, at the top of the list is "honor thy father and mother." We are to honor those that are older than us. It is a blessed thing that they are older than us and we are to delight in that. That is a gracious thing.

I love the fact that Scripture talks about the blessing of having white hair. I think about my mother whenever I think about the concept of white hair. The Scriptures consider that glorious:

"A gray head is a crown of glory; It is found in the way of righteousness." (Proverbs 16:31)

"The glory of young men is their strength, And the honor of old men is their gray hair." (Proverbs 20:29)

What the Proverbs is trying to teach is that there is something gracious and excellent about becoming an older man and older woman when you have been walking with the Lord. Is it a coincidence that the term that we use for the office of the shepherds of the church is "elders?" It's because they are. They're supposed to be not just older chronologically, but they are to shepherd us as if they were our fathers, grandfathers, and uncles.

There are some men that I really respect in ministry, some pastors. And it's not uncommon that when I'm speaking to some of these guys (they're like my heroes) I think of them as having accomplished a lot. They're older than me. I think of them with this spiritual spotlight and I think these guys are just so neat. They'll say, "Yeah, you know my elder, so-in-so?" And he doesn't mean that in the possessive; he means that in the sense of him belonging to them; he means it as if they were his father or his uncle. They'll say how they were having lunch with their elder how they were encouraged by them. They talk about these older men to us in a nondescript way. We don't know them, but they are a source of great encouragement spiritually to them. He sees them as uncles and fathers; as grandfathers. Even the most spiritual of men need such kind of men in their lives. The most spiritual women need such kind of women in their lives. We are to develop relationships; we are to do so even with those with whom we have to bring some issue of conviction of sin. We are to have that type of relationship with them.

I think it's curious that you have this sense of different approaches for different needs or situations. It's not weird or unusual to see that occur in Scripture. We find that even in [1 Thessalonians 5:14](#) where it says: "*And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men.*"

In that verse, "admonish" is the word *noutheteō* (νοῦθετέω) where we get our term "to prod," i.e. to prod them on to what is right. In other words, correct those that are unruly and encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, and be patient with all men. There are categories of need and you are to respond appropriately. It means that Timothy is commanded and we (in the background listening to such a command from the great apostle) are to realize that individuals have different needs. We need to approach them appropriately.

That's not a crazy or weird idea. In fact, even in Titus 2:4 there is that sense in which Paul is telling Titus how older women ought to be the main teachers of the younger women and they ought to be teaching them how to be husband-lovers; how to be children-lovers. The terms used are compound words, describing how wives should adore and cherish

their husbands; adore and cherish their children. That's some of the stuff that older women are to teach younger women. It makes sense because Titus is a guy. What is he going to do? What is he supposed to say to these women? There is a natural lack of wisdom in that because he's not a woman and it would be more natural and more appropriate for women to love (appeal) upon other women and to serve them that way. There are different needs and different approaches, but all of that to say your ministry is not excluded—you are to minister to all.

So here's Timothy, single and young. Here, he is embroiled in a difficult ministry of correction that's probably going to take a few years to accomplish and in the midst of that, who is he supposed to minister to? To older and younger men; to older and younger women. We cannot use anything as an excuse not to minister, but at the same time, we need to remember that there are different approaches to different issues. You need to have wisdom in all that and need to delight in that. We are to treat with reverence, with respect the older men and women.

How to Minister to Younger Men & Women (vv. 1-2)

“Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but *rather* appeal to *him* as a father, *to* the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, *and* the younger women as sisters, in all purity.”

How about the younger men and the younger women? Again, you have this parallel structure where you have masculine terms and feminine terms. In our English, that does not mean much to us since we don't have masculine or feminine forms. If it's a car, it's a car. It's not feminine car. It is just a car. But in the Greek, as well as in many other languages, there is a masculine form of a word and a feminine form of a word; there's even a neutral form of a word. Here, you have the same word for “younger” or *neos / neōteros* (νέος / νεώτερος) coupled with a masculine form *adelphos* (ἀδελφός) and then with a feminine form *adelphē* (ἀδελφή)—“younger men” and “younger women,” respectively. You have the same word *adelphos* (ἀδελφός) given to us in the masculine for “brother.” It means basically brothers and sisters and so clearly, we are to treat everybody with this sense of their familial relationship to us. We are to encourage those that are younger than us.

Here's an example of how we need to be careful about how we think about ministry. Our modern sense of ministry tends to have us focus on a particular group, to specialize caring for one ministry area. If I'm a youth guy, then we have certain expectations of what that means. I'm all excited and “gung-ho.” I may even dress weird. I organize all these different games, “Hey, I'm a youth guy that's what I do.” We have this sense that since this guy is doing youth ministry he has no business trying to address sin issues in older men or older women. But, we are not to be that way with ministry; we are to be involved in all ministries.

On the flip side, we might say, “I'm in charge of this Adult Ministry. I'm in charge of the Senior Ministry. I don't have time for the Children's Ministry. I don't even know how to deal with children.” And again, we'd be mistaken. Can you imagine this kind of attitude in [Mark 10:14](#)? There are all these children trying to come and get a blessing from our Lord and the disciples are saying, “No, the Lord is in the business of saving everybody and He doesn't have time for little kids.” What did our Lord say? *“Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”*

Apparently, our Savior had time for all. He could admonish those who were absolutely in sin and confront the Pharisees. And He can also draw little children to Himself to bless them and to encourage them to know that the kingdom of Heaven is for such as these. It's incredible and we need to be as broad in our understanding of ministry as well.

“Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but *rather* appeal to *him* as a father, *to* the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, *and* the younger women as sisters, in all purity.”

Timothy is commanded not to treat these “younger men” (men that are younger than him) as inferior or unworthy of his respect. We have a tendency to do that. “They're so young they don't know what they're doing. You just have to listen to what I have to tell you” That's not an appropriate attitude.

I like what George W. Knight says in his commentary, *The Pastoral Epistles: New International Greek Testament Commentary*.

“Timothy is reminded that in coming with the authority of a minister of Christ he is to regard those “younger,” not as younger or inferior, but as family peers, i.e., “brothers,” and conduct himself toward them in that way.”

So how are we supposed to treat guys that have less wisdom and experience than us? With disdain? Are we supposed to strong-arm them? No. We are supposed to encourage them as if they were our peers, our equals, our brothers.

We are to treat sisters in the same way. Just because they're younger than us, we don't strong-arm them about stuff, but rather, we care for them as if they were our sisters.

“...the older women as mothers, *and* the younger women as sisters, in all purity.”

This particular group (out of the four mentioned), “younger women,” comes with a slightly different emphasis. Now, it is

possible “in all purity” can emphasize how to minister to all four of them, but I don’t think so. I think the idea, especially in the Pastoral Epistles, is that he needs to deal in purity in regards to the sisters.

Paul emphasizes the concept of “purity” or chastity (i.e. sexual purity) in our interactions with the sisters. Why is Paul bringing that up? Apparently, it was a significant issue. We know that there are these elders who were taking households captive according to [2 Timothy 3:6](#); “... [captivated] weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses.” There is this sense that these false teachers had some impropriety about them, those who were supposed to be spiritual leaders, and their interaction with these younger women which is inappropriate. Thus, in [1 Timothy 5:11](#), Paul writes, “... refuse to put younger widows on the list, for when they feel sensual desires in disregard of Christ, they want to get married.”

In other words, before you put these younger widows on the list for care (which extended for their lifetime), they ought to consider if they just want to get married. They may end up breaking a vow to stay in the service of the church and not get married because of these impulses, these desires, causing them to want to get married.

There is always room for error in regards to purity and we have to be mindful of what Christ says in Matthew 5:27-30; He talks about purity in the context of what true adultery is. Adultery is not a physical act. Adultery is in the heart. When you look upon a woman to lust after her, you’ve already committed adultery in your heart. And because of this capability, we are to be careful.

As we interact with our sisters in the Lord that we are warned to keep ourselves chaste, pure, free from such attitudes of the heart. In Matthew 5:27-30, Jesus says to take such sins seriously. How seriously? Poke out an eye. Chop off an arm! I would say that’s pretty serious. I don’t think Jesus Christ is being literal. The idea is more of taking sin so seriously that we would cut off some luxuries in our lives; we’d separate ourselves from some things that cause us to stumble so that we could take of whatever that was required of us and so that we might walk in purity.

R. Kent Hughes in his commentary on the Pastoral Epistles says, “Pastoral warmth can easily be misinterpreted and also can be exploited.” There is reason to think that this was happening in Ephesus. Our behavior can easily be misinterpreted or exploited. We need to be careful about that.

Men, should you minister to ladies? Yes. Don’t be afraid that suddenly you can’t minister to the ladies. I know in our church (it’s a subculture thing) the guys don’t hug the girls. It’s always funny to me how guys don’t know what they are supposed to do when greeting or parting from female friends. Guys have no problem shaking hands with guys, patting other guys on the back, even giving one another hugs; all of that is acceptable between man and man. But when it comes to women, we’re not sure what to do. That’s okay, I don’t mind that. I think part of that is because we’re just culturally careful about that. There’s nothing wrong with that.

But listen, if you go to another church, you will find that sometimes some of the ladies will come up and will thank you and give you a hug and that’s okay. It’s not by way of sin, as far as I know. And I’m not trying to sin. That’s fine and that’s a blessing. We shouldn’t shirk our desire to minister because of some cultural thing. Keep that in mind.

Do not fear ministering to your brothers in the Lord. Do not fear ministering to your sisters in the Lord. If they feel awkward about certain things, take into consideration the weak conscience of your brother and your sister. If you know that a particular sister is not to glad about getting hugs, then it’s not your task in life to change her about that. Consider their weaknesses. Nevertheless, don’t forsake ministry because of cultural issues. Keep that in perspective. We ought to love one another.

Conclusion

In the end, this passage speaks of how we are to minister to older men and women, to younger men and women—how to minister to one another in the family of Christ—in the issues of sin. Do we all struggle with sin? Absolutely. Whoever is struggling with an issue of sin, we are to convict (by way of the Scriptures) yet with a loving and humble manner. We are to do so in such a way that they are either forced to actively rebel against the living God or admit you are right. That’s what we want to do. We want to present not our standard, but instead God’s standard. Would you honor the living God in this? To win over a brother or a sister, a father, a mother in that way—is there any greater delight than that? The emphasis for this year (if you would take it) would be that we need to emphasize humble service and desire to seek out those things that are most honoring to our God.

Consider the passage in Mark 10 when James and John come and say to Christ, “We want to sit in Your glory on Your right hand and Your left hand.” All the disciples were getting mad. Everyone’s angry, in a fit and here they are about to enter Jerusalem. It’s this awkward time for them to be upset about who’s really the greatest among them and Jesus calls them together and says this:

“But it is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all.” ([Mark 10:43-44](#))

The key in Christian ministry is simply this: if you want to be great in the eyes of God you need to become a servant. Whoever wishes to be first among you will be a slave of all.

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

Do we want to be like Jesus Christ? Do we want to be truly great? Then, we have to serve. We have to serve. They're so many things that I want for my children, but I want them to be great. And by greatness, I have to them it is not necessarily to be great in the things of the world. What if they're really good at sports? No. That's not greatness in God's eyes. What if they're really intelligent? They get scholarships to all of these Ivy League schools? Greatness? Not in the eyes of the Lord. What if they make a ton of money and maybe they're even generous with it? They're good guys. Greatness? Not really. In God's eyes, there's only one means of becoming truly great—to be a servant of all; to serve to the glory of Jesus Christ is true greatness.

There's a book by C.J. Mahaney called *Humility: True Greatness*. It is very good. In it, he had a list of some random things and it was just an encouragement to me because he names people that he knows at his church just as an example of individuals that he considers truly great. Let me read that to you to give you a sense of that as we finish up our time. He says:

"True greatness is embodied in people like Bryce, the godly teenage son who honors his parents and cares for his younger siblings, including his brother Eric, who suffers from autism. It's Theresa, a single woman with an infectious laugh who cheerfully serves numerous families in our church. It's Trey, a pastor friend of mine, who serves as assistant pastor to his son Rich. It's Eric, the successful businessman, who volunteers each Sunday at our church parking cars. It's Dick, the single man and postal worker, who lives a simple life so that he can give graciously to families who want to adopt children. It's Ken, the father who left his job and all that was familiar to move his family across the country to a stronger local church. It's Bernie and Pearl, the couple in their 80s, who despite severe health issues poured their hearts and lives into the small group that Bernie led. They are rejoicing now with their Savior. True greatness is all around us. The question is do we see it? Or more important are we pursuing it? That's the thing we need to ask ourselves—what is it that we really want?"

At least in these first couple of verses, begins an introduction on how to deal with all of these other delicate issues in the church; in a church that has a lot of problems. He begins by talking about graciousness and about truth; how both of those things used in humble service to the glory of Jesus Christ.

That should be our hearts' desire this year. That's my ambition for the church. If our church could be characterized by anything, I hope it's graciousness in truth; that there's this humility about our leadership and a humility amongst all of us. And I don't mean posturing. I don't mean talking like we're humble people. I mean genuine humility that isn't concerned about how you're perceived, but is more concerned about what we are doing. A humility that is active and real—one that actually goes out and makes a difference in the lives of others. That would be a blessing not just to us, but I think that would be a blessing to our living God and Savior. Let's close our time in prayer.

Heavenly Father,

We thank You for this time around the Scriptures. A time of encouragement, Lord, to remember that though we may have truth Lord, often we might contradict the Spirit of that truth.

We think about the Holy Spirit, Himself and how His ministry is such to us that He reveals to us, unfolds to us, the very truth that is written to us in the Word of God. He inspires, He makes the Word of God so clear to us, He illuminates and He gives us the truth of the Word of God. And He does it in such a way that our hearts and our affections, the very core of us are changed.

Lord, help us to be able to participate in the Holy Spirit's ministry: to pray for one another, to encourage one another, to build one another up, to admonish one another with the Word of God; to care for each other in such a way that we really build up that which is the family of Jesus Christ, here.

Father, as we do that, Lord, may we have the conviction to participate in true greatness. Not to accomplish things that the world might mark as things deserving of some hall of fame, but instead that we would desire more than earthly accomplishments, Lord, that You would honor us. That You would think of us that we have lived our lives in a great and wonderful way because we have desired to serve, Lord, even as Jesus Christ came to serve and then to die so that we might have life.

We give You praise for that and even as we prepare our hearts now Lord for Holy Communion, we remember that it is about Jesus Christ and His death for us and that's the only means by which we might have life in You.

So, Lord, prepare our hearts, prepare our minds and may we Lord, honor You in the coming year. No matter what difficulties come. No matter what issues that need to be dealt with. Lord, may we prepare ourselves even now to be committed to the things of the Lord, to live graciously to live under the banner of truth and to do it in such a way that you would find the greatest delight in our service.

Give us humble hearts that we might honor You, Lord.

*In Jesus' Name we pray,
Amen.*