

Living in God's Church Today

Treatment of Church Members

1 Timothy 5:1-16

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Scripture

Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to deal with false teaching and to instruct church members about living in God's church. In chapter 4, Paul set down the qualities of an excellent minister and the dos and don'ts of Christian ministry. Then, in chapter 5, he went on to instruct Timothy about how to treat the various kinds of members in the churches in Ephesus.

Let us read about treatment of church members in 1 Timothy 5:1-16:

¹ Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, ² older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.

³ Honor widows who are truly widows. ⁴ But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God. ⁵ She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day, ⁶ but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. ⁷ Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach. ⁸ But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

⁹ Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, ¹⁰ and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted

herself to every good work.¹¹ But refuse to enroll younger widows, for when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry¹² and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith.¹³ Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not.¹⁴ So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander.¹⁵ For some have already strayed after Satan.¹⁶ If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows. (1 Timothy 5:1-16)

Introduction

About a decade ago, writer and NPR commentator Heather King, a recovering alcoholic, came to faith in Jesus. She reflected on her initial experience with the church:

My first impulse was to think, *I don't want to get sober* (or in the case of the church, worship) *with THESE nutcases!* (or boring people, or people with different politics, taste in music, food, books, or whatever). Nothing shatters our egos like worshipping with people we did not hand-pick.... The humiliation of discovering that we are thrown in with extremely unpromising people!—people who are broken, misguided, wishy-washy, out for themselves. People who are... us.¹

Being a member of a local church is similar to being a member of a nuclear family. You don't get to choose your parents or siblings. Similarly, you don't get to choose who joins the local church. Everyone who believes in Jesus belongs to

¹ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2011/december/3122611.html>.

the same universal family, and must connect to a local church. Getting along with parents and siblings is not always easy. Similarly, getting along with brothers and sisters in Christ in the local church is not always easy either.

Timothy faced opposition in the churches in Ephesus. Some of it had to do with his opposition to the false doctrine. And some of it had to do with his relative youth. So, the Apostle Paul gave Timothy advice on how to treat various members in the churches of Ephesus.

Lesson

1 Timothy 5:1-16 shows us the proper treatment of various church members.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Advice Regarding Everyone (5:1-2)
2. Advice Regarding Widows (5:3-16)

I. Advice Regarding Everyone (5:1-2)

First, let's look at advice regarding everyone.

Paul wrote in verses 1-2, **“Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.”** Paul turned his attention to how Timothy was to deal with people of different ages in the churches in Ephesus. The Greek word for **“rebuke”** (*epipleo*) occurs only here in the New Testament and it means “to censure severely or angrily.” That was not the approach Timothy was to take with an older man. Instead, he was to come alongside and **“encourage”** him. The Greek word for **“encourage”** (*parakaleo*) occurs 111 times in the New Testament and here it

means “to earnestly support or encourage a response or action.” Paul wanted Timothy to treat an older man as a father and, if the older man had done something wrong, Timothy was to come alongside him and support him in doing the right thing. Moreover, Timothy was to treat people of various ages in the church as he would his very own family members.

John Stott has an interesting comment on these verses. He writes, “I find here good biblical warrant for a recognition in the congregation of the generation gap. True, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. Yet it seems to me artificial in the West when students breeze up to me and hail me by my Christian name, even though I am old enough to be their great-grandfather! The Asian and African cultures are wiser, since they encourage young people to address the older generation as ‘uncle’ and ‘auntie.’”²

Paul’s point is that the church is a family and that there must be proper respect shown to various members. Older men are to be treated as fathers. Younger men are to be treated as brothers. Older women are to be treated as mothers. And younger women are to be treated as sisters. There is much wisdom in these verses if they are practiced as Paul instructed.

II. Advice Regarding Widows (5:3-16)

And second, let’s notice advice regarding widows.

Paul spent 2 verses on various members and 14 verses on widows. In some sense that should tell us about the importance of caring properly for widows. Paul makes a distinction in these verses between older widows and younger widows.

² John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 125.

A. *Advice Regarding Older Widows (5:3-10, 16)*

First, let's look at advice regarding older widows.

Paul set down three principles regarding older widows.

First, honor and provide for true widows. Paul wrote in verse 3, **“Honor widows who are truly widows.”** The word **“honor”** is used in the commandment to honor one's father and mother (Matthew 15:4), and it means “to show respect and high regard for” someone, in this case, widows. In Paul's day, a wife was much more dependent on her husband for provision than is the today. So, when the husband died, a wife was often left in a very difficult place financially and socially. Paul was concerned that Timothy and the church take care of those who were vulnerable and without means of support.

Paul wrote in verses 9-10, **“Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work.”** In Paul's day, 60 was considered the age of retirement. By that age, women had completed bearing and raising children. Thus they would have time to devote to serving God and his people. They were also less likely to remarry and become preoccupied with that commitment. To **“be enrolled”** referred to a list of widows, older than 60, who were specially recognized for their ministry in the church. The term **“the wife of one husband”** is literally a “one-man woman” and is similar to the requirement for elders and deacons who were to be a “one-woman man.” That meant that the widow was faithful to her husband. The widow who was to be enrolled on the list of widows who were serving in the church required her to have **“a reputation for good**

works,” some of which are then listed.

Paul wrote in verse 16, **“If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows.”** Paul summarized and restated what he has been saying in verses 4-8 with the addition that, as the situation warrants, Christian women are included in this responsibility for the support of widows. In other words, the church is to assist widows only if the family is unable to do so.

Depending upon the circumstances, many widows often do have financial support. This may be due to savings, Social Security, or family members supporting them. However, there are occasionally widows who do not have adequate financial support. It is for these widows that the church must come alongside to help and support them. The church does so because God has a great concern for widows, along with orphans.

Second, do not support non-desolate widows. Paul wrote in verse 4, **“But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God.”** The church is to honor widows by caring for their needs, but if a widow has a family that should take care of her, then this is not the church’s obligation. Children and grandchildren are indebted to those who brought them into the world, reared them, and loved them. Fulfilling this responsibility **“is pleasing in the sight of God.”** It is a mark of godly obedience. In Paul’s day, there were no assisted living communities and so this responsibility fell first to the family. If the widow had no family, then the church was to assist in caring for the widow.

Paul then wrote in verse 8, **“But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his**

household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” Verse 8 is a negative statement of the positive principle in verse 4. A believer who failed to obey this command was guilty of a lack of love. Moreover, such a believer was **“worse than an unbeliever,”** for many unbelievers in that day took care of their aged parents.

We live in a time in western culture in which provisions are made for aging citizens. So there are retirement communities and assisted living communities to help take care of aging relatives. Sometimes, however, the costs of such a facility are beyond the reach of families. Nevertheless, the principle still stands that children are to assist in the care of their aging parents. The church only comes alongside when additional help is needed (or if there are no children to take care of their parents).

Third, do not support self-indulgent widows. Paul wrote in verse 6, **“...but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.”** A widow who was not living for the Lord but was living for herself and her pleasures **“is dead even while she lives.”** In other words, she was spiritually dead while she was physically alive.

The church has no obligation to take care of widows who are not professing believers and members of the local church. Love will compel a church to help a widow once or twice but if she shows that she is using the help to aid her in her self-indulgent lifestyle, the church does not need to give any further help. One of the difficulties in our day is that churches get phone calls or drop-ins from people with whom we have no relationship. They request financial help but there is no easy way to know whether they really are in need. I remember years ago in my former church, we used to have a lady who would call us about every six months or so asking for financial help. Sometimes she would call two or even three times on the same

day. We realized that she was working through the phone book of churches in the town. So, I used to say on the second call, “Please mark us off as a church that you have already called!”

Paul wrote in verse 7, **“Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach.”** Earlier in 1 Timothy 4:11, Paul said to Timothy, “Command and teach these things.” Now, in verse 7, he adds a command to the previous one. Timothy is to command the children and grandchildren of needy widows to practice godliness by taking care of their parents. The content of the command refers to what he wrote in verse 4.

B. Advice Regarding Younger Widows (5:11-15)

And second, let’s look at advice regarding younger widows.

Paul set down a rule for younger widows and then he gave a reason for that rule.

First, the rule: let them remarry and raise children. Paul wrote in verses 11-12, **“But refuse to enroll younger widows, for when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith.”** Widows younger than 60 were not to be enrolled in the list of those who were engaged in special ministry in the church. The phrase **“their passions draw them away”** is from the Greek word *katastreniao* and it occurs only here in the New Testament. It means “to have strong sexual desires” and is an expression that is used in a marriage relationship. Paul saw that younger widows might want to remarry. They would then turn away from their commitment to remain single. Apparently, in Paul’s day, younger women made some kind of pledge not to remarry when they

were placed on the widows' list. They promised to serve the Lord and his people for the rest of their lives. Though they intended to serve the Lord and his people, if they wanted to get married again and break their pledge, they would incur condemnation for having done so.

We do not have a "widows' list" in our churches today. Widows do not make pledges to serve the Lord and his people for the rest of their lives in exchange for financial support from the church. Sometimes widows have financial support through various possibilities, such as insurance payouts, savings, government assistance, and so on. Nevertheless, the church should always make sure that widows are properly supported and not neglected once their spouses die. Younger widows who would like to remarry should be encouraged to do so, provided they marry a believer. All widows should continue to serve the Lord and his people to the best of their ability, and they should continue trusting that the Lord will take care of all their needs.

Paul continued in verse 14, **"So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander."** Clearly, the younger widows that Paul had in mind were still of childbearing age. Although they had lost their first husbands, there was still the potential for remarriage and having children.

I knew of a woman whose husband was killed in an accident. Sometime later, she married again. As far as I know, they have a happy marriage and the wife was actively involved in the ministry of her new husband. They were a great team serving in a difficult neighborhood making a wonderful difference in the lives of people.

And second, the reason: remarriage will keep them from sin. Paul continued in verse 13, **"Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but**

also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not.” Paul’s concern was that the passions of the younger widows might cause them to break their pledge to serve the Lord and his people. That is why he encouraged them to get married again. **“For,”** Paul noted in verse 15, **“some have already strayed after Satan.”** Satan here is the devil, the believer’s adversary. Paul did not state exactly what following after Satan meant. Some of the younger widows had given up their commitment to serve the Lord and his people (see vv. 11-12). They may have done so by either following the false teachers or promoting their false doctrine. Or they may have done so by marrying unbelievers and bringing disgrace upon the church.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the treatment of church members in 1 Timothy 5:1-16, let us put Paul’s advice into practice as we interact with various church members.

When we become Christians, we became members of the same universal church family. We don’t get to choose with whom we worship and serve. We come to worship because God commands us to do so and because being an active member in the fellowship of Christ’s Church is the best place—the only place—where we grow and mature and become more like Jesus. It is in this context that we interact with fathers and brothers and mothers and sisters in the faith. Some are married, some are single, and some are widows. It is in this context that we learn to love one another and serve another as together we worship and serve our Savior. May God help each one of us to do so well. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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