

1 Timothy 5
Teachings on Widows and Elders

1 Timothy 5:1-25 (KJV)

¹ Rebuke not an elder, but intreat *him* as a father; *and* the younger men as brethren;

- Most narrowly, this would refer to an ordained elder, but the context would seem to refer more broadly to any aged man, because it is subsequently contrasted with younger men.
- The concept of respecting elders is appears in many places throughout scripture, but is not practiced enough in the world today.
- The author assumes that his readers know how to treat their earthly fathers respectfully, to not harshly denounce him, and they tell us to treat other older men as we would our fathers. Sadly, many people don't even show proper respect for their father, so they may miss the point of this passive.

Leviticus 19:32 (NIV)

³² "Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD.

Proverbs 16:31 (KJV)

³¹ The hoary head *is* a crown of glory, *if* it be found in the way of righteousness.

Job 12:12 (KJV)

¹² With the ancient *is* wisdom; and in length of days understanding.

Job 32:6-11 (KJV)

⁶ And Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite answered and said, *I am* young, and ye *are* very old; wherefore I was afraid, and durst not shew you mine opinion.

⁷ I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom.

⁸ But *there is* a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.

⁹ Great men are not *always* wise: neither do the aged understand judgment.

¹⁰ Therefore I said, Hearken to me; I also will shew mine opinion.

¹¹ Behold, I waited for your words; I gave ear to your reasons, whilst ye searched out what to say.

- We see here that even when a young man had the truth, and his elders did not, the young man still listened first, before voicing his opinion.
- Ultimately, he responded by correcting the advice the other aged men had given Job. This highlights that while the aged do deserve extra respect, a chance to speak first, etc., they can be mistaken as well, and may need correction.

Paul's advice to Timothy, who is a young man, is to be careful in correcting an aged man.

Combining all of these verses, I think the idea is that we should respect elders, but realize that God, not man is the ultimate authority. We obey authority when it is scriptural, but we resist authority that is opposed. Although elders should have grown spiritually, they too may make mistakes.

² The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity.

The advice to treat our entire fellow Christians as family members helps us to understand how close, loving, and respectful we should be to each other. We should all be treating the older women in the congregation as our own mothers.

³ Honor widows that are widows indeed.

⁴ But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God.

Widows have never had it easy. Throughout history, it is traditionally the man who provides for the family financially. When the husband passes, the widow is often left in financial difficulty. As is often the case, the husband dies first, lower life expectancy for men, but also men often marry a woman a little younger. So it's not uncommon for a woman to spend the last 5-15 years of her life as a widow. The primary responsibility for providing for a widow is her family – children, nephews, etc.

Care for widows are often mentioned along with care for the fatherless as a fundamental and defining characteristic of God's people. The fatherless and widows are among the most vulnerable members of society. Showing mercy, care, attention, and love for these individuals is at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian.

James 1:27 (KJV)

²⁷ Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, *and* to keep himself unspotted from the world.

Exodus 22:22-24 (KJV)

²² Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child.

²³ If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry;

²⁴ And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.

Deuteronomy 24:19 (KJV)

¹⁹ When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands.

Deuteronomy 27:19 (KJV)

¹⁹ Cursed *be* he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, Amen.

So we see that the fatherless and the widows are often mentioned together as vulnerable individuals who need special protection. The verse in Deuteronomy also mentions the stranger, which I believe would be an immigrant – a non-Jew living among the Jews. So although I know that immigration is a sensitive political topic, especially in 2017, I do think there is a clear Biblical requirement to not mistreat strangers in our land. Immigrants, similar to the fatherless, and the widows, are often vulnerable, economically disadvantaged, and at risk of being taken advantage of.

Deuteronomy 10:16-19 (KJV)

¹⁶ Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked.

¹⁷ For the LORD your God *is* God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward:

¹⁸ He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment.

¹⁹ Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

⁵ Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day.

So we have a qualifying term her – a widow indeed... A widow indeed is one who seems to qualify for support of the church as the loss of her husband would render her desolate – poor and dependent condition, in addition to the sorrow and loneliness Even a widow who is not desolate may require an extra amount of emotional and logistical support, but a widow who is desolate qualifies for support from the church.

Paul will go on to add some more restrictions when considering whether a widow should be supported by the church, which includes her age, available support from family, and her devotion to Christ.

⁶ But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.

⁷ And these things give in charge, that they may be blameless.

So we see that a widow who is constant in supplication and prayers may be eligible for support, but a widow who seeks a life of pleasure may not.

⁸ But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

We use this verse to apply most often to a man providing for his family financially, but it is technical referring to a son providing for his widowed mother. It's a really stern condemnation – a man who does not provide for his widowed mother, or even his widowed aunt, as we saw a reference to nephews earlier, is said to have denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

I just want to re-emphasize that point. Refusing to care for a widow you are related to is an act of denying the faith. If we profess faith with our mouth, but deny by our actions, we have denied the faith. We also see here the concept of those in your own household having a higher claim on financial and emotional support than others outside the family.

⁹ Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man,

¹⁰ Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work.

So we see that in order for a widow to be cared for by the church, she must be at least 60 years old, and have had only one husband. Paul then goes on to list a few good works she must have exhibited in her life – and frankly the list overlaps with many of the requirements of an elder! To have done well in raising children, to have been hospitable, to have been a servant, to have relieved the afflicted, and to have been diligent in good works.

One point on the phrase about having been the wife of just one man. There is, of course, some difference of opinion on this. I think the simplest answer is probably what is intended – that a widow indeed be a woman who was married just once, and her husband has died. Although a widow can legally remarry, it seems that having been married a second time is not necessarily a widow indeed. It seems that having been married only once in your life connotes a degree of respect and honor.

Luke 2:36-37 (KJV)

³⁶ And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity;

³⁷ And she *was* a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served *God* with fastings and prayers night and day.

¹¹ But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry;

¹² Having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith.

Romans 7:2-3 (KJV)

² For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to *her* husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of *her* husband.

³ So then if, while *her* husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.

1 Corinthians 7:39-40 (KJV)

³⁹ The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.

⁴⁰ But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God.

So we have a couple other passages in scripture that tell us it is permissible for a widow to be remarried. The language in 1 Timothy at some level seems to contradict the passages in Romans. If its Okay for a woman to remarry after her husband dies, why does 1 Timothy refer to it as having damnation and casting off their first faith, but also encouraging young women to marry in verse 14 of our text.

I think the distinction lies in what is proper for a widow in general versus a widow indeed. Paul encourages young women to marry, which I think would apply to young widows as well. But a widow indeed who accepts support from the church accepts certain stipulations as well – to continue in prayer and supplication. So it seems that perhaps being a widow supported by the church is a bit like employment. It would be a disgrace for a woman to enter into this service, only to later decide that she wanted to remarry. So while it is not sinful or disgraceful to remarry after a spouse dies, it would be looked down on for a widow to remarry after entering the care of the church.

¹³ And withal they learn *to be* idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.

Being a widow indeed isn't all ham and jam. Temptations arise – an opportunity to be idle, to gossip, and to be busybodies. I'm sure you've all noticed that the people who gossip the most tend to have the freest time – truly busy people don't have time to be busybodies.

Busybody: a person who is too interested in the private lives of other people

We're all occasionally tempted to gossip, and to be too involved, or too meddlesome in the private lives of others, but it seems that those with the most idle time are most tempted. The antidote to this temptation is simple – get busy!

¹⁴ I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully.

Get married, have kids, take care of the house – you will be far too busy to gossip or get overly involved in other people's lives! A simple quiet life of work and service of others removes so many temptations. We've all heard the phrase "idle hands are the devil's workshop." And although it's not a verse from the Bible, I think it's a biblical concept.

¹⁵ For some are already turned aside after Satan.

¹⁶ If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed.

Again, as mentioned before, the first responsibility falls on the son, grandson, and nephews. Frankly, this makes the instance in which the church would care for widows relatively rare, as the first line of support would fall to a potentially wide range of descendants.

We now revisit the topic of elders. We covered the requirements of elders back in chapter 3, and mentioned at the start of this lesson bout not rebuking an elder but treating him like a father. We now return to the topic. Where as the admonition to treat elders as fathers probably refers to all older men, this verse seems to narrow down more specifically on elders who are in leadership roles.

¹⁷ Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.

¹⁸ For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer *is* worthy of his reward.

The word rule is a verb meaning "to preside over" or "to have the care of." So elders, or older members of the congregation should be respected, but those ordained elders who rule well should be counted worth of double honor. The concept of laboring in the word and doctrine is interesting. We usually think of labor as being physical labor. But deep study is absolutely labor. It is time consuming, mentally taxing, and can even be emotionally draining. The message here is very clear – he elder whose labor in his duties as elder interfere with his secular employment is worthy of support by the congregation. Now, if he doesn't need the support, or want the support that's a different fine. The apostle Paul himself often refused financial support even though he spent most of his time in the service of the Church. In some cases he did not ask for support because he did not want anyone to have anything bad to say about him, or because he didn't want to be a burden. But he makes it clear that he was eligible for support, and that to have some would have been fair. But I think we may underestimate the real value and service an elder provides the congregation.

Matthew 10:5-10 (KJV)

⁵ These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into *any* city of the Samaritans enter ye not:
⁶ But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
⁷ And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.
⁸ Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.
⁹ Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses,
¹⁰ Nor scrip for *your* journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat.

1 Corinthians 9:3-14 (KJV)

³ Mine answer to them that do examine me is this,
⁴ Have we not power to eat and to drink?
⁵ Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and *as* the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?
⁶ Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?
⁷ Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?
⁸ Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also?
⁹ For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen?
¹⁰ Or saith he *it* altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, *this* is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope.
¹¹ If we have sown unto you spiritual things, *is it* a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?
¹² If others be partakers of *this* power over you, *are not* we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ.
¹³ Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live *of the things* of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?
¹⁴ Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.

¹⁹ Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.
²⁰ Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.

Deuteronomy 17:6 (KJV)

⁶ At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; *but* at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death.

So we see that the idea of need two witnesses was present back in the OT as well. Elders are to be respected, having earned their position of authority, but that doesn't mean they are above the law. There's a high hurdle to get over before an accusation against an elder should be heard.

²¹ I charge *thee* before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.

This is another important concept – to not be preferential in judgments. This means, I believe, to disregard, previous judgments, rank, wealth, personal friendship, etc. God is no respecter of persons, and the men in authority of the church should also be focused on faithfully and fairly making Godly judgments.

²² Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure.

I think the admonition to Lay hands suddenly on no man refers to not being hasty in ordaining elders and deacons. To hastily appoint a man to the eldership without proper vetting would be to, in some sense, partake in his sins, whether through being tempted, or to simply be seen to associate with or seem to approve of that man and his sins.

²³ Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.

Its not completely clear how this verse goes with the context of the teaching on elders. Perhaps Paul, in writing to Timothy about these issues, is reminded how much labor and anxiety will result from Timothy's execution of these commands, and is reminded of a health ailment Timothy has. It would seem that Timothy may be a tee totaller, not in the habit of drinking any wine. Paul is encouraging him to drink just a little wine.

I think modern doctors would almost never prescribe that someone start drinking wine if they currently drink none. There are health benefits, but on average, they are outweighed by the risks, including potential addiction, and the fact that any alcohol is even more easily stored as body fat than sugar. The liver's priority is to detoxify alcohol before processing anything else; drinking slows down the burning of fat, which leads to weight gain. I think the current medical thinking is that moderate alcohol consumption is a moderately bad habit, and the more you drink, the worse it is for your health. That said, I was raised to believe that all alcohol consumption is sinful, and that's a notion clearly not supported in scripture. Drunkenness and excessive alcohol consumption is sinful.

²⁴ Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some *men* they follow after.

²⁵ Likewise also the good works of *some* are manifest beforehand; and they that are otherwise cannot be hid.

Interestingly, we depart from the topic of wine after just one verse. It appears to have been a flow-of-consciousness thought Paul had when writing the letter, rather than being part of the discussion – think of it as a parenthesis in the broader discussion...

We return to the topic of appointing elders don't do it hastily. He now gives a reason behind that – some men's character is clear and they may be appointed to the ministry. Other men may not be so clear, and you may need to observe for a while. But ultimately, the works of each man will be clear, and that is where you make judgments.