

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

“Our Care for Those in Need ”

1 Timothy 5:1-16

We are going through 1 Timothy chapter 5 and today we are going to look at sixteen verses. This is a big chunk of 1 Timothy chapter 5 and since this is a section that really connects together as one topic, I decided to just take the whole thing. So, 1 Timothy 5:1-16 and I will read it from the New American Standard.

“Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers, (2) the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity. (3) Honor widows who are widows indeed; (4) but if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family, and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God. (5) Now she who is a widow indeed, and who has been left alone has fixed her hope on God, and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day. (6) But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives. (7) Prescribe these things as well, so that they may be above reproach. (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. (9) Let a widow be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, having been the wife of one man, (10) having a reputation for good works; and if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints’ feet, if she has assisted those in distress, and if she has devoted herself to every good work. (11) But refuse to put younger widows on the list, for when they feel sensual desires in disregard of Christ, they want to get married, (12) thus incurring condemnation, because they have set aside their previous pledge. (13) And at the same time they also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention. (14) Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach; (15) for some have already turned aside to follow Satan. (16) If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, let her assist them, and let not the church be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed.”

So, this is a large chunk but on one central topic. This coming out from, if you recall, the last chapter where we were called to pay close attention to ourselves and our teaching, and as we are paying close attention to our teaching, passing that along so that others will be ensured salvation. Then we should think about who we are communicating to, our audience, and as we are communicating we have some instructions in the first two verses.

The first section, verse one and two, speaks of helping those who are in spiritual need, and as we communicate to them we are to help them in a certain way. How we are to help them is to not sharply rebuke them. “Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers, (2) the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity.” We should treat people in a way that they can receive what we are saying. And sharp rebukes don’t tend to communicate the love, the care, and allow people to hear what we want to say.

Put it another way, this is from Proverbs 15:2, *the wise make knowledge acceptable*. So, it is not only instructive for us to not sharply rebuke older people but also it’s not wise either, because they will tune us out, because as it so is, older people not only think they know more than we do but

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often do know more than we do, and to sharply rebuke them does not give them the respect due. So, the wise man makes the knowledge acceptable and seeks to communicate in a way that they will receive.

This is how to help, but now there is a list of a great number of types of people and what's interesting about this list is it really covers the gambit of everyone, older women and men, younger women and men. We should be communicating truth to everyone, but as we do this, there is a view here of these people. The view is as of a family.

The Scripture portrays Christians constantly as connected one to one another in a family context, which should tell us something. What it tells us is how you view people determines how you treat people. So, if you view each other as a family, you will treat each other as a family. If you view each other as fathers, as domineering or some one to be ignored, then you are not going to be giving them the respect deserved. If you treat the older women as mothers-in-law rather than mothers you might treat them poorly. If we don't treat the younger women as sisters, then we get all kinds of problems particularly in youth groups. And if we treat our younger men as rivals, competitors, people to beat out rather than brothers, then we get unhealthy comparisons. So, how we view people is critical, and the Scripture encourages us and describes us as viewing each other as family, brothers and sisters in Christ. If we do that, we will help each other in our spiritual need better.

The bulk of this section though is helping people in a physical need and this is from verses 3 to 16, and it really breaks up into two sections. Verses 3 to 9 speak of the responsibilities of the church. The church has responsibilities for people in need, and then verses 10 to 16 speak of the responsibilities that Christians have as individuals. Let's first look at the responsibilities of the church.

The first responsibility in verse 3, "Honor widows who are widows indeed." The church must both esteem and examine those in need. This says honor widows. It is specifically speaking of financially, but there is a respect incurred as well with financial assistance. We esteem widows, but there is a particular subset of widows spoken to. These are the widows indeed. This term widows indeed (others versions say really widowed) comes again in verses 5 and 16. It means something. It means widows who have a particular need that the church has an obligation to meet. This obligation is differentiated from the opportunities we have to serve people. We have lots of opportunities, many opportunities to serve, but certain people we have an obligation to serve.

You remember the story of the Good Samaritan where the Samaritan person, after a priest and a Levite had come and ignored the person who had been robbed and beaten by the roadside, came and took that opportunity to help the person, and Jesus said he is the neighbor. He treated him as a neighbor.

Well, we have many opportunities and we should take advantage of these opportunities, but we have some obligations as well. Sometimes our obligations may come in competition with the opportunities. For example, if I had an opportunity this morning on the way to church to help somebody and I took that opportunity, I might not be here speaking to you and there would be one big vacant hole here where everyone is looking for someone to fill it. I have an obligation to get here and speak to you, so I might neglect some opportunities in order to fulfill my obligations.

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So it is with the church. We have many opportunities and we want to maximize the opportunities we have for ministry, but certain things are obligations to us and we take those obligations seriously. This is given so seriously that Paul gives a lot of instruction on how to fulfill the obligations that the church has. To widows, widows who are widows indeed, we have an obligation towards.

Now notice that these obligations are towards widows not to widowers. We differentiate between men and women. Women are in a particular view here, as people who are in need that require assistance and help. It doesn't mean we can't help men, but our obligation here is specifically to women, to widows.

Now, as we examine what qualifies someone as a widow indeed, someone that has needs that we have to help, we start out with their need. How needy are they? Verse 4, "But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family, and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God." We must examine their need, and widows indeed, widows who are really needy, are those that we have an obligation to support, those who are not able to support themselves in other ways.

Now in our day and age, our culture, things have changed somewhat, and whether you think this is a great idea or a bad idea or somewhere in between, our society has established something called social security which came out of the depression era in the 1930's in order to offset the difficulties that older people were having financially. So, we as a church are paying into this. We all pay our wages into the social security system that cares for people that are older and that helps, but that's different than what Paul was writing about.

Another thing that is different is that the number of widows is less because people are not dying from being persecuted as a church. But in the day when Paul was writing, some people were being killed off simply because they were believers, and we find that in the book of Acts. People that were being killed were often men. We find the men being taken, which left widows.

So, the circumstances are somewhat different today, but we still have obligations to make sure that widows are not neglected, and sometimes that may just mean that we help for a period of time until they are in a place where they can be taken care of by the social system that our country has established. But if there wasn't a social system that helps, then we have responsibilities.

So, widows must be taken care of if they cannot take care of themselves, but there are more requirements. If they don't have children that can care for them, or grandchildren, or now that as people are living older even great grandchildren then they fall into the category of widows indeed. But if they have children, the children have a responsibility to care for the parents and the grandchildren have a responsibility to care for the grandparent.

Verse 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." So, we have a responsibility toward our parents, a biblical responsibility, and so a person didn't get into the category of being a widow indeed if they had family to support them, but sometimes they didn't. As you see in verse 16, this applies to extended families. If a widow had dependent widows and she was able to assist those then she should.

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Now, if they don't have a family support system there is other criteria that should be examined also. In verses 5 to 8, there's an examination of their character. Verse 5, "Now she who is a widow indeed, and who has been left alone has fixed her hope on God, and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day." Those who are widows indeed, those we have an obligation to, have fixed their hope on God, they pray day and night. Those who are not widows indeed, verse 6, have given themselves to a life of wanton pleasure and they are described as dead even while they live.

People as they get older and seek to live for themselves and squeeze every last enjoyable moment out of the life that is passing away from them are described as dead even while they live. Widows indeed, widows that are getting preferential treatment and put on the list to be cared for, are those who are not fixing their hopes on the things of this earth and trying to gain the best of what life has to offer here but are trying to serve God and to focus their attention on things of the spiritual realm. When widows are focused on that, they have that kind of character that they qualify as a widow indeed.

Now, the challenge here is that the people who are in physical need have greater temptation. They are tempted to sin. If you recall, Proverb 30:8-9 says, "Give me neither poverty or riches; Feed me with the food that is my portion, Lest I be full and deny Thee and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or lest I be in want and steal, And profane the name of my God." So, both extremes of poverty or riches are tempting, and those who are in physical need have temptation. If the widow can maintain a focus on God, then they are widows indeed.

The reason verse 8 is here is because even tax gatherers love those who love them. "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." He is worse than the unbeliever because even the worst of the worst, even the evil people who are making a living, and an exorbitant living at that, off of the backs of the poor of the nation of Israel took care of their own families. They loved those who loved them, and when we don't love those who love us, we are worse than an unbeliever, and we are a black mark on the church. It's an embarrassment to God's church if we are not taking care of these responsibilities. We have these responsibilities. We should take care of these responsibilities.

Another thing we should examine, in addition to their character and their need, is their age. "Let a widow be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, having been the wife of one man." Now this assumes you can find out their age. If they are willing to tell you that they are older than 60 then they must be really needy, so that requires some attention. Not less than 60 years old, and there are reasons given to this later on. But just generally speaking for now, the people who are older have less of an ability to take care of themselves and have more need for others to help them, because they have less of an ability to be self sufficient. In our society, people that are older have a harder time finding occupations to help them in their situations. People that are younger and even women are more able to find jobs that are able to support them if they fall into difficulty. So, people that are older require more attention. Paul gives the number 60 as one to examine.

Now there is a view here, and the view is not so much what tragedies brought them to this place. There's not the view toward the past of how badly their situation was so as to move us with compassion towards the people that had it really bad. There's more of a view of what is required to provide for the needs of these people and if they had the kind of character and life that met the qualifications of being widows indeed, then we are obligated to act. It's not so dependent on how

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guilty we feel or how badly we feel about the persons situation and how they got to that situation, it's more looking at their need and how the church must care for their need.

The last thing to examine is verse 10, "Having a reputation for good works; and if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, and if she has devoted herself to every good work." This is quite a list of expectations that that person must have met.

The wife of one man is the flip side of husband of one wife. If you recall from the qualifications of elders, it's a one-wife man or a one-husband woman, that type of a person. This doesn't mean that they must never have married again, because later on we find that he's encouraging younger widows to get married. So, what it means is they are having the character quality that devotes themselves to one person that is alive in a marriage relationship.

Also, they have a reputation for good works. They are known for helping people, serving people, and here is the type of people they serve. They serve children, they've brought up children, they've helped children, whether it was even their own children or others that they assisted in bringing up and serving.

They showed hospitality to strangers, people that they didn't know or were connected to. They welcomed them; they greeted them. Godly women are able to reach out to people they don't know and serve them as strangers.

They washed the saints' feet. That's a metaphor for they served in the church, they've helped fellow believers, assisted them, even those who are in distress, in troubles, in difficulties. They have risen to the occasion and taken those opportunities to serve people and devoted themselves to every good work, all kinds of good works. This is quite a list. When people are conducting themselves in this way it gains respect. It's almost as if we are compelled to serve and help these people. We can't help ourselves; we respect them so much. But just in case, we don't want them to fall through the cracks and this is what Paul directs us here.

As we look to how women should function, I would like to suggest that a good women's ministry is purposed towards service. Women's ministry is not only devoted to Bible study. You know I love Bible study. I read the Bible and enjoy studying it, but it's a means to an end. It is not the end of itself, and the end that we are seeking to gain from learning about what the Bible says is to put it into practice to serve people and God most notably.

A good women's ministry is purposed towards service. It's using the knowledge that we gain about God, about how He wants us to live, in order to put that into practice to serve others, and women who have a reputation for good works, serving children, serving strangers, serving fellow believers, serving people in distress, in need, in trouble, they are to be respected and supported when they are in times of need and become widows indeed.

We have an obligation to them as a church. As we fulfill our obligations as a church, individual Christians have certain obligations and responsibilities as well and that's the last part of verses 11 to 16. This looks at what individuals are to do. Verse 11 then speaks of younger widows, people that

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are not 60 yet. “But refuse to put younger widows on the list, for when they feel sensual desires in disregard of Christ, they want to get married.”

Their first responsibility is to be right with God, to be committed to the Lord. This is an interesting section here because it can lead you to think that there is something wrong with younger widows wanting to get married. But just a little later in verse 14 Paul says, “Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach.” So, that is really something that he expects. And remember back in those days that the social structure was such that families were more involved in marriage. It’s a little harder to say to people today, “well I want you to get married” because widows today aren’t as able to pull that off. But when you have a social network of families who connect people towards arranged marriages then it’s easier for this to occur, and they enjoyed more family involvement in marriage and relationships and marriage unions back then.

But younger widows want to get married. That's normal and that is even encouraged, and this is why they are not being put on the list. And Paul writes that if they were put on the list then, they would be tempted to want to get married and thus incurring condemnation, because they have set aside a previous pledge. Which leads you to think that this list had some strings attached to it. This wasn’t just people that were being helped. These are people that are being helped that had made some type of commitment when they were being helped, and so Paul instructed Timothy in guiding churches to not put younger widows on the list but rather they are being instructed to get married, bear children, keep house.

It’s the older women that have made a commitment who are not as tempted to incur condemnation and set it aside. So, we don’t get a lot of detail about what this commitment is but apparently it was a commitment to service because that is what the widows are being described as. Those widows indeed were described as serving. Serving the church rather than being in a position to serve a family.

Younger widows are more likely to end up in a position to serve a family and that would off set their previous pledge. So this is why the younger widows are not being put on the list because of this natural desire and good desire they have for family. Older widows have passed that stage of life and are more able to fulfill that commitment. So, when we serve people by helping them as a church, it is not wrong then to expect some commitment, some response on their part, some help back for the body of Christ.

Verse 13 gives us more instruction, that we must resist temptation. We must not put ourselves in situations where we will be tempted by our natural desires. Verse 13 speaks of two other types of challenges.

One is being idle. We must resist idleness, because widows could learn to be idle if they are being supported by the church, if they have not matured to the point of being able to gain assistance and still serve. That's like the sin of omission. They didn’t do things that they were responsible to do. Then there is this sin of commission. In addition to idleness that could lead to gossip “And at the same time they also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention..,” women can involve

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themselves in idleness and then gossip and beginning to get involved in things, meddling in peoples affairs in ways that are unprofitable in gossiping.

And this could be a very destructive thing for the church. And women are very good at communicating and relating and that's a wonderful thing, but that ability can also be a bad thing if it's not done in a godly fashion, and if it's done with gossip, and if it's done with being a busy body meddling in the affairs that are not appropriate for them to be involved in. So, there's some instruction for these younger widows and that's to take responsibility. We must be responsible for ourselves. We must be able to put ourselves in a place where we can become responsible

Verse 14, “Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach.” This kind of strikes me as the MRS degree that girls go and seek to gain when they go to college, particularly Christian colleges and seek to get married there. Well, they could use this as a proof text, but I don't think that's specifically the intent here. The intent here is for younger widows to be busy, fruitful, productive, serving through marriage, family, household, which we should position ourselves as women to accomplish if we can, but remember that not everybody can achieve this. Even when people get married they sometimes lose their spouse or even their family. So, I would suggest (this in my humble opinion) that it's responsible to plan ahead.

We will be responsible for ourselves if we are industrious, if we are able to take the needs of our lives seriously and plan ahead. And here is how you plan ahead if you are younger. If you are older it's more difficult to plan ahead because so much of the things have already happened in your life and you are now living out some of those decisions. But when you are younger and you haven't yet had the decision made yet to plan ahead, when you go to college to get an MRS degree remember that that may not be the end of your life there. Put yourself in a position be able to care for your own needs because that is healthy for each of us to be able to care for ourselves and not be dependent on people. Gain abilities, skills to be able to help us survive and not only survive for ourselves and provide for ourselves and take responsibility for ourselves but even put ourselves in a position to do more than that and be able to take responsibility for others. And if we are going to take on responsibilities for others, we will have to take responsibility for ourselves first to be able to provide for our own needs and then have enough to care for others.

Verse 16 describes people that have taken responsibility for themselves and have put themselves in a position by Gods grace to be able to serve others. “If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, let her assist them, and let not the church be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed.”

If there are women that become in this unfortunate situation of being a widow, and they have been able to provide for themselves and serve others, they should, and that is a godly thing, to serve others. Then the church is not burdened. The church people, the people who are making up the church can then devote themselves to others, assist others, who are widows indeed, and that is a good thing.

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You see, the more responsibility we take, the more responsibility we allow others to take, and the more responsibility you are able to take for those in need around you, the more the church as a whole can serve others better. The more we can devote our attention to those people who are in need and the more we take opportunities that come our way, the church will not be as tied to those who are needy because people are taking responsibilities as well, individually. If we can get these physical needs cared for so that people are not becoming poverty stricken in our fellowship, then we can spend more and more of our energy on spiritual needs. The church will not be burdened caring for the physical needs, but will be able to give more and more attention to what is most important and that is spiritual needs. And that would serve us well as a church. So take care with the responsibilities you have for yourself, for your family and other opportunities around you so that more and more of us can be focusing on spiritual needs of those around us.

Let's pray together. Lord, we thank You for Your Scripture, Your instructions to us, Your guidance. We pray that we can take seriously the obligations that are instructed to us. That we would not have people who are widows indeed, who are in need and suffering, that we could provide for them. We also pray, Lord, that we could take advantage of opportunities of service for people in physical situations that we can take care for as a church and do that well and honorably. And mostly, we pray that we can do the work that You have called us to as far as making disciples. And be able to use the resources that we have as a fellowship to accomplish the work that you have commanded to us. In Jesus' name, Amen.