

## Study Notes for [1 Timothy 5:1-16](#)

### STRENGTHENING FAMILY TIES

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#### **Introduction:**

In this passage Paul continues to speak directly to Timothy regarding his personal conduct and the role of the church in supporting widows – both young and old – in the church. Why does Paul give Timothy all these instructions about widows? Clearly it was a major concern within the Ephesus church. Older widows seem to have been demanding and receiving financial support even though they had families who could support them. Younger widows seem to have been lead astray by the teachings of the false elders/ teachers. In both these instructions to Timothy, Paul is concerned for the individual as well as the health of the church as a whole.

#### **Annotated Outline of Passage**

1. Treat the people in the church as family (vv. 1-2)

Paul instruct Timothy on how to relate to men and women both young and old. Older men and women are to be treated as fathers and mothers; younger men and women as brothers and sisters. Timothy should treat younger women with purity.

2. Supporting widows in the church (vv. 3-16)

- i. Families with widows (vv. 3-8)

Paul states that a family must first take care of their own widowed mothers and grandmothers; this shows piety. Those families who do not are “worse than unbelievers.”

- ii. Older widows with no support (vv. 9-10)

Paul instructs Timothy to only put older widows “on the list” who are in real need and who also are making a contribution back to the church.

- iii. Young widows (vv. 11-16)

Young widows are instructed to remarry, bear children and take care of their homes so that they are not lead astray by the false elder/ teachers and their own desires and so end up “following Satan.”

#### **Notes**

- 5:1-2 Although Timothy should not let anyone look down on him because he is young, he should also not rebuke older men harshly even though he might think they deserve it. However, if men older than himself are not following as they should Timothy does have the responsibility to encourage (“exhort” NIV; “appeal to” NASB – note that the same word is translated in the NASB as “urge” in 1:3 and 2:1, “exhort” in 4:13 and “preach” in 6:2) them to do the right thing.

Note the family references throughout these two verses; Paul views the Christian community as the family of God ([Galatians 6:10](#); [Ephesians 2:19](#); [3:15](#)).

Timothy, as a young man, must also treat younger women “in all [absolute NIV] purity”. Paul emphasized this because it was likely an issue with the false elders ([5:11](#); [2 Timothy 3:6-7](#)).

- 5:3-16 In this whole section Paul provides instructions for how widows within the church at Ephesus should be treated. It seems that widows who had no other means of support were registered in some way (v. 9); such widows actively worked in the church. However, the greater concern appears to be younger widows. The concern may well be with their relationship to the false elder/teachers. This would be the case if the “weak women” of [2 Timothy 3:6-7](#) are identified as these widows (Fee, 115).
- 5:3 Paul begins this section by highlighting that ‘true’ widows are to be honored. This likely implies some form of financial support but also means respect. Paul’s concern throughout this passage is who is and who is not considered a ‘true’ widow; that is, who should be and who should not be getting support from the church. Widows who do not qualify are those with family and friends (vv. 4-5, 8, 16) and younger widows (vv. 11-15).
- 5:4-8 This five verses form a small chiasm (Fee, 118).  
 A. Instructions to immediate family (v. 4)  
 B. Instructions to ‘real’ widows (v. 5)  
 B’ Judgement on disobedient ‘real’ widows (vv. 6-7)  
 A’ Judgment on disobedient immediate family (v. 8)
- 5:4 In this verse Paul addresses the children and grandchildren of widows. Paul makes it clear that ‘religion’ begins at home. Children and grandchildren practice godliness in the way they care for their mothers and grandmothers who are in need of help. Paul even states that it “pleases” God to see his adopted children take care of their mothers and grandmothers even though he views this as a “repayment” for what these mothers had previously done for their children.
- 5:5-6 In these two verses Paul is speaking about the “real” widows (“she”). Such a widow cannot expect help from her immediate family and so puts all her hope in God, praying continually (“day and night”) for help from him. (See as an example, Anna in Luke 2:36-38). Such a woman does not live for worldly pleasures but for God’s glory.  
 “fixed her hope on God” – ‘hope’ means trust, patience and expectation; ‘on God’ means that this hope is centered on God as the fulfillment of the hope. The grammar implies that the widow has already placed her hope on God and continues to place her hope on God (perfect tense). God uses people to answer her prayer. (Knight, 219)  
 “wanton pleasure” – means ““give oneself to pleasure, live for pleasure,” “live luxuriously or voluptuously,” “live in indulgence” (Knight, 219).  
 “dead even while she lives” – means she is spiritually dead (not a believer) and so has no entitlement to the church’s support.

- 5:7 Interestingly, Paul now tells Timothy that he should urge widows in need to behave just as he explained in the previous two verses. Clearly not all were doing so and they need to be encouraged – as one would encourage a mother – to give themselves wholeheartedly in dependence on God.
- 5:8 Paul again address the family of a widow. This time he strongly pronounces judgement on a family who does not provide adequately for their widowed mother or grandmother.
- 5:9-10 In these verses Paul gives the qualifications of ‘real’ widows who might expect financial support from the church (“put on the list of widows”). Age<sup>1</sup> and lack of support are not the only criteria, they must also have: 1) been faithful to her husband 2) have a reputation for doing good deeds 3) showed hospitality to other than just her friends and relatives 4) show humble servanthood (“washed the feet of the saints”) to all members of the church and 5) devoted her life to helping those who were in need. This is the model for elderly widows. Clearly such a woman is a deeply godly woman and so deserves support from the church.
- 5:11-12 Paul now moves to younger widows<sup>2</sup>. They should not be on the list for two reasons: they want to get married and they are tempted not to live godly lives. The first reason comes from their desire to remarry which supersedes their devotion to Christ. It may well be that this includes their willingness to marry outside the Faith and so have broken their first pledge to Christ (Fee, 120). Later in v. 14 Paul urges these same younger widows to marry but within the Faith. Or it could mean that these younger widows having been put on the list and so having pledged to live their lives solely for Christ, now want to marry after all and so break their pledge to remain single (Knight, 225; Quinn, 440). In any case, it cannot be simply that they want to remarry that is a concern to Paul. After all, remarriage is encouraged (v. 14; [1 Corinthians 7:39](#)).
- 5:13 Paul goes on to describe the second reason for not including them on the list which is that they are not living godly lives. Instead of doing good works they are idle and instead of being hospitable humble servants they are busy bodies and gossips. This likely is referring to spreading the teaching of the false elders. Again, it may be that because they were on the list and so supported by the church that they had time to be idle (Knight, 224).
- 5:14 As a result, Paul advises (the tone is actually stronger, “I want” NASB, ESV) that young widows should remarry because they should not be supported by the church. This advise is also at odds with the false elders who appear to forbid marriage (4:3). Paul assumes that they will bear children which is what is normally expected from marriage. They are also to “manage their households” (ESV, NIV) which assumes “a good deal of authority” (Towner, 356) – note the stronger translation than the NASB’s “keep house.”

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<sup>1</sup> Towner suggests that the age of sixty given in v. 9 was there to reduce the size of the list because it had become too large (Towner, 346).

<sup>2</sup> We are not told how old these “younger women” are. Clearly less than sixty (v. 9) years old. However, it would appear that Paul was thinking of women even younger since they were still able to remarry and have children.

“give the enemy no occasion for reproach” (NASB) – the reference to “enemy” could refer to the false teachers but given the reference to Satan in the next verse it likely also refers to Satan.

5:15 We finally understand why Paul has just spent so much time on this issue. It is a serious problem in the church and as a result “some have already turned aside to follow Satan.” Exactly how they have followed Satan is not stated but “its sinfulness is evident from the characterization itself” (Knight, 229). Paul’s pastoral heart feels the urgency of having Timothy correct these as soon as possible so that not more young widows “turn aside.”

5:16 Here Paul finally makes it absolutely clear that the church is only to help those elderly widows that are in real need; that is they have no family to support them and they have through their lives shown a life of godliness.

It is somewhat surprising however, that Paul states that “any woman who is a believer” should support their mother or grandmother who is in need. What is unexpected is that men are not mentioned<sup>3</sup>. We can only speculate on why this is the case. It is possible that Paul had just been talking about the role of younger widows and so was simply focusing on women.

## References

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<sup>3</sup> It is so surprising that later Greek versions had “or man” added by an enterprising scribe who though it should be there; but the best NT Greek texts do not have that.