



A Study of 1st & 2nd Timothy

1st Timothy 5:1-16 Old Men and Widows...

I am reading from 1st Timothy chapter five, verses one through twenty-five. If you're using one of the pew Bibles, the passage is located on page 992...1st Timothy 5:1-16.

This is what God's Word says:

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 5:1**...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.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 5:3**...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.

ESV 1 Timothy 5:9...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 marry ¹² 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.

The Apostle Paul wrote 1st Timothy to encourage his beloved son in the gospel, Timothy, to stand up to the false teachers that had come to plague the church at Ephesus. Paul was not surprised by the fact that false teachers had crept into the church. In fact, Paul had warned the Ephesian elders back in Acts 20 that such false teachers, he refers to them in Acts 20 as ravenous wolves, were going to invade the church at Ephesus later on in an attempt to subvert the gospel of grace. Paul even went so far as to tell the Ephesian elders that some of *them* were going to be numbered among those false teachers.

Listen for a moment to Acts 20 where Paul meets with the Ephesian elders at Miletus. Remember this is Paul prophetically pouring out his heart to them as a warning of what is to come.

ESV Acts 20:28...**“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. ²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night**

or day to admonish every one with tears. ³² And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³ I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. ³⁵ In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" ³⁶ And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. ³⁷ And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, ³⁸ being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.

And sure enough what Paul had warned them about is exactly what happened. Some of the elders at Ephesus turned out to be false teachers and began to preach something other than the gospel. They began, instead, to turn the Old Testament into a sort of mysterious, proto-gnostic, speculative philosophy. They began to deny that the law of God was given principally to condemn men's hearts in preparation for the gospel. We're not sure of exactly *how* they did that because Paul writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit chose not to explain their error in detail.

I think, perhaps, there are two reasons why he chose not to do that.

First, Timothy would have already known exactly what their error was. He would have already discussed the Ephesian heresy with Paul in detail. I suspect they would have been informed about the nature of the heresy perhaps through letters from some of the church members at Ephesus or perhaps through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. It makes sense, I think, to believe that since the Spirit of God had revealed to Paul the fact that that some of the Ephesian elders were going to turn in heretical wolves, he would have also revealed the exact

nature of the heresy at Ephesus clear to Paul and then Paul would have in turn explained it clear to Timothy.

Secondly, by choosing not to spell out the exact nature of the heresy at Ephesus Paul's exhortation to Timothy regarding how he might confront the heresy at Ephesus suddenly takes on an almost universal application. That is, Paul's exhortation suddenly has significance not just for the heresy at the church at Ephesus but far beyond to the fight against heresy at any church anywhere at any point in the history of the church.

I think Paul's intention through the Spirit of God is to give us the basics for standing against the perversion of the gospel no matter when it occurs or where it occurs. And here's the funny thing Paul's solution is rather simple. His solution is to relentlessly preach the gospel, to appoint good men to leadership in the church, and to have the Ephesians live lives that reflect the transforming power of the gospel.

That's it...relentlessly preach the gospel, appoint good men to lead the church, and to live lives that genuinely reflect the transforming power of the gospel.

Now the last time we were together we noticed that the manner in which Paul chose to communicate the importance of living lives reflective of the transforming power of the gospel had taken on a whole new intensity from what has gone before. We noticed that Paul began to switch from just general discourse to very specific commands. That is Paul switched from just talking about the importance of the gospel and hanging on to the treasure of the gospel to giving Timothy and the Ephesians some very specific things to do.

Do this...

Don't do that...

Do this instead...

And this, this, and this...

The last time we were together, I took the time to explain that grammatically Paul switched from general indicative verbs to imperatives. An indicative verb is a used to make a simple declaration. An imperative verb is a verb that gives a command. Chapter four contains eleven imperative verbs in a row. Chapter five contains sixteen in a row. Chapter six contains eleven in a row. Leading up to chapter four there are only four imperatives used altogether.

What that means practically is that Paul is more or less fully focusing in chapters four, five, and six almost specifically on the way the Ephesians ought to live and get along together in light of what the gospel has accomplished in their lives.

None of that is really all that surprising in light of what Paul does elsewhere. He often spends the first half of a letter talking about what God has done and then turning in the second half of his letter to how Christians ought to live in light of what God has done. It's called the indicative and the imperative. The indicative focuses on what God has done. The imperative focuses on what God requires of his people in light of what he has done. None of that, as I have already said, is really all that surprising.

It is surprising, however, that in the middle of this imperative section here in 1st Timothy five that Paul would spend so much time talking about the church's obligation to widows.

I want you to consider this for a moment.

In chapter five, Paul takes two verses to talk about how Timothy and the Ephesians need to treat older men, older women, younger men and younger women. He then fourteen verses to talk about how Timothy and the church are obligated to take care of their widows and how they are to go about doing that, and then he finishes the chapter by devoting four verses to the issue of making sure that teaching elders are properly paid and not unfairly treated.

I can assure you there is a lot more preaching in America on those last four verses of 1st Timothy 5 than there is on the first sixteen. Go figure.

Still the real question is, **“Why does Paul do that? Why does he spend so much time talking about the care of widows in the church at Ephesus?”** I want to spend most of my time this morning trying to answer that question, and I want very much for you to come along with me this morning. I want you to come along because this particular issue is going to become increasingly important both in the future of the church and in many of your own personal lives. That is true because our church has so many young couples in it which means that the message contained in 1st Timothy five is going to be particularly relevant to you as a group as you move into the future. Many of you are going to have to decide what to do with aging parents...how to care for them...how to honor them. It also means that as a church you are going to have to decide how to deal with an increasing number of older believers who have families somewhere that have no intention of providing for them or their needs.

Still before we get to that, let's allow Paul to develop his argument his way.

Look at 1st Timothy 5:1.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 5:1**...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.

Paul starts out his discussion in chapter five by reminding Timothy not to rebuke an older man but to encourage him as a father. Now the verb itself is a second person singular verb...which in East Texas speak means it is technically a singular **“you”** and not a **“y’all.”** Still, I think in the context it is wise to say the principle of respect toward older men is intended to be applied to all those in the church. I mean it is clearly directed toward Timothy but it is difficult to imagine Paul saying something to the effect of, **“Timothy you need to treat older men with respect but the rest of you at Ephesus can go ahead and treat older men like dirt if you want.”**

No, I think the command it is directed toward Timothy but is applicable to all those in the church at all times.

Now the reason it comes up here is because Timothy has been given the responsibility to confront the false teachers in Ephesus many of which would have been older than him. Still, even in the midst of doing that he is not to forget that older men deserve a kind of reverential deference. Timothy is not simply to beat older men into submission. He is not to do that even though he carries the full backing of Paul’s apostolic authority.

I want you to think about that.

He carries the full weight of Paul's apostolic authority and yet he is to treat older men with respect. He is to encourage them as fathers.

It is a lesson that has been almost entirely lost in this generation.

In former times, age meant the accumulation of wisdom, and wisdom if nothing else was to be respected in the elderly. Listen, for example to Leviticus 19:32.

^{ESV} Leviticus 19:32... "You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the LORD."

The book of Lamentations extends the importance of respect by saying that one of the primary judgments that occurs when a society turns away from God is that old men are no longer respected.¹

Anyway, Paul doesn't want Timothy to forget that. He wants him to address older men with civility and kindness even when they make mistakes, even when they fall into error.

We attempt to foster that kind of respect in the school where I teach. We require students to stand up when another teacher enters a classroom. They have to stand up and greet the person entering. I think a lot of people hear that and think isn't that quaint and wonderfully old fashioned. We don't mean it to be quaint. We mean it to be a reflection of biblical respect.

I remember once when I was a boy around eleven or twelve my grandfather, my dad and I were building a barn together. Actually, my dad and I were doing all

the work. My grandfather was simply supervising or better simply getting in the way. He had had a couple of strokes and was pretty feeble. He walked with a cane and usually stood watching us work all the while squeezing a little red rubber ball trying to regain strength in his right hand. Anyway, my grandfather and my dad got into an argument over how a portion of the barn was to be constructed, and finally my grandfather said to my dad, **“You know I am happy to argue the issue with you, but in the end we’re going to do it my way. In the meantime, I would prefer you not use that sort of tone with me. I would hate to have my grandson see you get a whipping.”** Now my dad was built was built like Hercules. He was a machinist at LTV and he had arms like Popeye the Sailor. He could have folded my grandfather up like an accordion. But he didn’t. He turned and looked at me and winked and then said, **“I’m sorry Dad. Of course, you are right. It won’t happen again.”**

I grew up, you see, understanding that older men deserve a kind of respect. I was made to answer, **“Yes sir”** or **“No sir.”** When an older man spoke to me or greeted me I stood up to greet them, shook their hand, and looked them in the eye.

I cannot tell you the extended benefit that doing that sort of thing has provided me over the years. I have gained access to and the friendship of a number of extraordinary men over the years simply because I have taken the time to treat them with respect. I have sat and learned at the feet of men who stormed the beaches at Normandy and at Leyte. I have talked to men that have suffered privation and heartache and have somehow managed through the grace of God to just keep on going. I have learned a bit about endurance and longsuffering and none of that would have ever happened had I not learned the importance of giving such men the deference they deserve.

Let me give just one example.

Years ago when I first got into the ministry, I had a man in my church named Mr. Feemster. Mr. Feemster was old and feeble and couldn't see very well and had a hard time hearing. Over the years, I tried to cultivate a relationship with him and we grew pretty cordial with one another. One Sunday, we had a fellowship lunch and so I sat down by Mr. Feemster and we started talking. Finally he asked me how seminary was going and so I just told him, **"Mr. Feemster, it is darn near about to kill me. I'm working two jobs. I'm not getting much sleep, and I am down to my very last dime."** I remember he looked me right in the face and said, **"You know Tom, I was in a German prisoner of war camp in World War 2. I was there almost two years, and while I was there I had to eat grass soup from time to time. I never really cared much for grass soup, but there was one really important side benefit. Every since that day, I've been able to eat pretty much any soup Moma puts on the table."**

It was his way of saying, **"You know you'll survive if the Lord wants you to so strap it up. I know whereof I speak."**

Now let me ask you, **"What's a story like that worth?"**

It is worth a fortune to me, and I can tell it because I showed an older man the kind of respect he deserved.

Of course, that kind of respect is not just to be limited to older men. It is also to be shown to younger men as well. We are to treat younger men as brothers. Now what that means practically is that we are never to get into a mindset where we

think of someone as an idiot. The moment the thought pops into your head that some other young man in the church is an errant knave Paul's point has already been lost on you. You'll remember that earlier in 1st Timothy 2:8 Paul admonished the Ephesian men to stop quarrelling with one another and to start lifting up holy hands together in prayer. I suspect that the kind of quarrelling that was going on there had to do with was going to be king of the hill and had denigrated into name calling and shouting matches. Paul's point here is that even in the midst of correcting doctrinal error we ought to be respectful and deferential. Now I do recognize there is a place to put you foot down, a place to stand and fight. I recognize that there are hills worth dying on. But that is certainly not true of every single disagreement. Paul's point is that when younger men make mistakes or err we ought to teach them not as our inferiors but as our younger brothers.

Still, Paul doesn't stop with the men...he continues on to discuss the women in the church, and as he does he keeps the analogy going.

Look at verse two.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 5:2**...older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.

Now you'll notice that you have to supply the verbs from verse one in order to understand Paul's point in verse two. That is, you have to bring the verbs "**rebuke**" and "**encourage**" down from verse one to make sense of verse two.

Paul's point is that Timothy and the Ephesians are not to rebuke an older woman who errs but to encourage her as a mother. Nor are they to rebuke a younger

women who errs but they are to encourage her as a sister...and they are to do that in a way that always demonstrates a continual commitment to purity.

Now that doesn't mean we are to sweep sin or egregious error under the rug. What is means is that we are not to use a sledgehammer to drive in a finishing nail. We are to be characterized by gentleness. I couldn't help but think of just how the Lord Jesus dealt with his own mother on occasions where he could have been much sterner.

You'll remember when he was twelve years old and stayed behind at the temple and his mother and father panicked over the thought of having lost him and then proceeded to rip into him a bit for scaring them that he simply responded to his mother by saying, **"The both of you do realize, of course, that I had to be in my father's house."**²

You'll notice there is nothing snippy or discourteous about his answer. It is gentle and gracious. And he responds the same way to her in John 2 when she tells him that the wedding party at Cana had run out of wine, **"Lady, what is that to you and me. My time has not yet come."**³

That is the manner in which we are to treat older women in the church, and we are to do the same thing with younger women as well only with the additional caveat that we are to minister to younger women in a way that demonstrates an unflagging commitment to purity.

That means that men in the church must be careful about visiting in homes where a woman is alone. We are not to provide any opportunity for a woman's reputation

or our reputation for that matter to be besmirched. We are not to provide any opportunity for our actions to be misunderstood or suggestive of hidden motivations. I've tried to make it a point over the years to never visit a woman alone in her home unless she old enough to be my mother. My wife has been very helpful in guiding me in such matters. I have also made it a point over the years to never visit a woman in my office alone unless there is another person, preferably a woman, nearby. At work, I try do the same thing at work with female students or faculty...in my own case it is made somewhat easier by the fact that my classroom and office is a bit like a fishbowl with glass windows all around.

Well that's the first two verses of chapter five and you can see that Paul is concerned that as Timothy addresses the error and false teaching at Ephesus that he is not to become overly harsh. He is to be gentle and encouraging where he can and when he can.

Now starting in verse three, and I'm not quite sure how far we'll actually get in looking at this, Paul turns to the care of widows at Ephesus.

Now I made the point earlier that there is a sense in which this whole discussion is a bit surprising at least in terms of how much space is devoted to it. I'm not sure why that should be so surprising but it is. It probably shouldn't be. I mean think for a moment about many of the greatest stories in the Bible have to do with widows who are all alone. Commentator Philip Ryken notes a number of such examples.⁴

First, there is the story of Ruth and Naomi. Why is Ruth so blessed in her dealings with Naomi? She is blessed because she shows compassion and loyal love to

Naomi, and she does so when no one else will. And later into the story, it is much the same with Boaz. He steps up and cares for Ruth who cares for Naomi and out of that sort of compassion a family is born that brings forth David the King.⁵

And it was the same for Elijah and his kindness to the widow of Zarephath.⁶

And it was the same for the widow to whom Elisha provided an abundance of oil later on in 2 Kings.⁷

It was even the same in the ministry of the Lord Jesus. He took special compassion on the widow of Nain and raised her only son from the dead, just as he noted with great affection the poor widow who put her last two coins in the offering box at the temple.⁸

And why did all those stories and characters find their way in the biblical text. They did so because God himself has always been quite interested in widows.

^{ESV} **Exodus 22:22**...You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child.

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 10:18**...He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 27:19**..."**Cursed be anyone who perverts the justice due to the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'**

^{ESV} **Psalms 146:9**...The LORD watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

Philip Ryken writes this:

Undoubtedly, the special emphasis on widows says something about the church in Ephesus. For one reason or another, the Ephesians needed help knowing how to care for their widows. Timothy may even have written to ask for Paul's guidance in this area. But the attention to detail in these instructions also says something important about God. God has special place in his heart for single women, especially for widows. Here it should be noted that the Greek word for "**widow**" refers to any woman without a husband, and not simply to a woman whose husband had died. Kent Hughes wisely comments: "**Today the application of this passage should be wider, because modern American culture has produced a category of women virtually unknown in the first century—Christian women and children who have been abandoned by their spouses and left without family support. Godly single mothers are a new class of 'widow.' And those without family and resources are the church's sacred responsibility.**"

Ryken continues:

The reason for God's concern is that widows were vulnerable in the ancient world. The learned historian William M. Ramsay wrote that given "**the narrow restrictions of ancient social life, it was not easy for them to maintain their children after the earning member of the family had died, and they stood in need of special consideration and help.**" Without the protection of a man, widows were sometimes exposed to physical danger. They lacked the economic power to provide for their needs, especially in old age. The same is often true today. For all these reasons, God was concerned about the welfare of widows.⁹

Now we've come almost to the end of our time and I haven't even managed to read verse three which is where the section on widows begins. Let me do that and tell you one final story and then we'll pick it up right here next week.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 5:3**...Honor widows who are truly widows.

When I was at Arlington, we had a lovely widow in our church named Avis. Avis was a precious woman in her early forties. Her husband Bob had been a godly man and wonderful evangelist. Anyway, one day Bob was out running and had a heart attack and died. Avis and Bob had no children and although Avis had a good job and didn't particularly need any of us to provide her money, she did need help occasionally in dealing with the world.

After Bob died, Avis decided to buy a used car. She bought one from what she thought was a reputable dealer only to find out later that the car had been in a flood in Houston and had been under water for several days before it was cleaned up and presented to her as a car that had no serious issues.

Anyway, one of our deacons took that injustice quite personally. He made a call on the car lot that sold Avis the car. At first, he appealed to the salesman and even the owner of the lot to make things right. They refused. He then explained that we would be taking them to civil court to sue for a replacement vehicle. The car lot owner responded that he had a good lawyer and would be willing to take his chances. The deacon explained that we had a number of lawyers in our church who were willing to take on this particular injustice for free. The deacon then explained that the church had about four hundred members and who were all willing to picket his shop until the owner changed his mind. He also explained that we had one of the principal editors on the Ft. Worth Star Telegram in our church who was more than willing to run a number of editorials highlighting the injustice of a few used car lots in Ft. Worth and their willingness to take advantage of widows simply because they could.

The car lot owner agreed to refund Avis her money and took back the car.

Now was that a proper understanding of Paul's idea here of giving honor to those who are widows indeed. I don't know for sure. But I love the story and it is certainly a wonderful example of church protecting a widow from a world willing to take advantage. I think Paul's point may be even more specific. I think Paul may be even more concerned about making sure that the church itself not mistreat such precious women but give them honor, and protection, and care because they are truly all alone.

I'll try to develop the thought even further next week, and if I've lost my way I pray you'll be gentle with me too. Remember I'm an old man myself.

Let's pray.

¹ **ESV Lamentation 5:7**...Our fathers sinned, and are no more; and we bear their iniquities. ⁸ Slaves rule over us; there is none to deliver us from their hand. ⁹ We get our bread at the peril of our lives, because of the sword in the wilderness. ¹⁰ Our skin is hot as an oven with the burning heat of famine. ¹¹ Women are raped in Zion, young women in the towns of Judah. ¹² Princes are hung up by their hands; no respect is shown to the elders.

² **ESV Luke 2:48**...And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "**Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.**" ⁴⁹ And he said to them, "**Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?**"

³ **ESV John 2:1**...On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. ³ When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "**They have no wine.**" ⁴ And Jesus said to her, "**Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.**"

⁴ Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy (REC)* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P& R Publishing, 2001), 199.

⁵ **ESV Rut 1:16**...But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. ¹⁷ Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." ¹⁸ And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

⁶ **ESV 1Kings 17:7**...And after a while the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land. ⁸ Then the word of the LORD came to him, ⁹ "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you." ¹⁰ So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink." ¹¹ And as she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." ¹² And she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die." ¹³ And Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son. ¹⁴ For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain upon the earth.'" ¹⁵ And she went and did as Elijah said. And she and he and her household ate for many days. ¹⁶ The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.

⁷ **ESV 2 Kings 4:1**...Now the wife of one of the sons of the prophets cried to Elisha, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the LORD, but the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves." ² And Elisha said to her, "What shall I do for you? Tell me; what have you in the house?" And she said, "Your servant has nothing in the house except a jar of oil." ³ Then he said, "Go outside, borrow vessels from all your neighbors, empty vessels and not too few. ⁴ Then go in and shut the door behind yourself and your sons and pour into all these vessels. And when one is full, set it aside." ⁵ So she went from him and shut the door behind herself and her sons. And as she poured they brought the vessels to her. ⁶ When the vessels were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another vessel." And he said to her, "There is not another." Then the oil stopped flowing. ⁷ She came and told the man of God, and he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debts, and you and your sons can live on the rest."

⁸ Luke 18:1-8 and Mark 12:41-44.

⁹ Ryken, 198-9.