

HONORING AND CARING FOR WIDOWS

1 Timothy 5:1-16

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Note: The following are the pastor's notes used in preaching this message. This is not a complete, word-for-word transcription of what was preached. These notes serve as a companion to the complete message, which is available by listening to the audio version. Bible quotes are primarily from ESV.

INTRODUCTION

This morning we'll see from God's Word how to relate to others in God's family, especially those who are our family's most vulnerable—widows.

I. THE CALL TO ENCOURAGE FAMILY MEMBERS (1 Timothy 5:1-2)

- **Observation #1: note the two verbs**
 - *Don't rebuke* means to *not strike out at*. It's not in an imperative command form; *encourage* is the imperative command here. The focus is on verb #2.
 - "Encourage" is the normal word *parakalew*, *to come alongside* someone. Here, the gentler sense of *parakalew*—*encouragement*—is what Paul intended, over against *rebuke*.
- **Observation #2: note the relationships**
 - It's assumed here that the church relates to one another like a family. This is consistent with the dominant image in 1 Timothy of the church as the *household of God* in 1 Timothy 3:14-15.
 - Thus, we are to view our church relationships and conversations along this line. The church really is a family, and we should relate to one another accordingly.
- **Application:** the church has a fantastic opportunity right now to model what it means to come alongside people we need to correct or confront. Here's why: our world has lost the ability to gently correct or confront... What an easy way to be counter-cultural. Renew your mind in the refreshing truth of these verses—*don't rebuke/strike out at*, *encourage/come alongside* your church family.

II. THE CALL TO HONOR WIDOWS IN NEED (1 Timothy 5:3-8)

House rules abound here with regard to widows. Why? Because widows are the most vulnerable members of the family, and so they must be cared for.

You all know Steve Mawhorter. He wrote his master's thesis on this passage, on what he called, "The Modern-Day American Widow" [pp. 21-22, 26]—SAMs are *left alone* as well.

A. If a widow doesn't have extended family... (1 Timothy 5:3, 5-6)

1. Then her church family must care for her, (1 Timothy 5:3)

In Paul's mind, there is a direct correlation between the fifth commandment then and honoring the widows in the church in his time. *Honoring* seems to include not just the internal respect or reverence due them, but the external outflow of material provision for them as well. This dynamic is clear from 1 Timothy 5:4: *show godliness* means making internal godliness external. How? By making provision. The same noun *honor* will carry similar connotations with relation to certain elders in 1 Timothy 5:17-18.

2. While she lives for God (1 Timothy 5:5), not herself (1 Timothy 5:6).

For her part, the godly widow has set her hope on God and prayer. The widow who slips into reckless living apparently was in play back then, and can be today as well. Paul says that kind of widow is alive physically, but dead spiritually—a serious warning to any widow considering that course of life.

B. If a widow does have extended family... (1 Timothy 5:4)

1. Then the bio family must care for her

Extended family here is defined as children or grandchildren (or relatives) in 1 Timothy 5:4. Here are God's house rules for each of us who have elderly parents generally, and specifically an elderly mother. Interestingly, we must *learn* to show godliness. Why? Because God knows some of us with widowed moms or elderly parents may need to learn to overcome reluctance to repay our parent(s). The

command to honor our parents began when we were born, and continues through life. Why do this? Why learn this?

2. Because God is pleased with them as they care for her!

If you're a child or grandchild/relative working hard to care for your mother or grandmother or aging parent—know that God is well-pleased with you!

C. Serious about honor (1 Timothy 5:7-8)

1. Caring for widows is commanded

2. Not caring calls one's character into question

3. Not providing calls one's profession of faith into question

This is serious stuff. There may be someone here who is not caring for their mom or grandmother who is a widow in need. Apparently that was happening back then in Ephesus as well, so Paul commands the church there to fall in line on this. Look at how serious God is about this. We must honor widows by caring for them.

III. THE DIRECTIONS FOR HONORING WIDOWS (1 Timothy 5:9-16)

A. Enroll older, mature widows (1 Timothy 5:9-10)

There are two main options regarding what this enrollment was about: 1) Some think it was about enrolling widows on a list of those who were eligible to receive care and aid; 2) Others think that the enrollment referred to widows who formed a kind of widows' ministry, who received care and help, but who also ministered to the younger widows in the church. We can't know for sure, but at least care and help are in view, and probably ministry as well. It seems like there was a widows' list or group or ministry, and certain widows were eligible, and others weren't. The older, more mature widows were to be enrolled. Their maturity was marked in several ways in 1 Timothy 5:9-10.

1. A faithful age

60 was considered the age of retirement then. Paul seems to be taking the retirement age as his age for qualification for widow's ministry or assistance.

2. A faithful wife

She must have been literally a "one-man woman" (1 Timothy 3:2, 8). These widows were to be held to similar account as church leaders.

3. A faithful reputation

a. Mothering

This word occurs only here in the New Testament, meaning *to nourish children*. She must have faithfully raised her children.

b. Hosting

This word means literally *to welcome strangers*, similar to elders, who are called to *love strangers* (1 Timothy 3:2).

c. Serving

This would occur as she would humbly serve folks arriving perhaps at church or to her home, having dirt- and dust-caked feet from their journey.

d. Caring

Care for the afflicted indicates that she serves those literally *under pressure*. This woman cared for afflicted souls in the church family.

e. Working

Not only did she have a reputation for good works (1 Timothy 5:9), she was busy doing them! These are godly widows indeed! These are noble pursuits for any woman.

B. Don't enroll younger, less mature widows (1 Timothy 5:11-15)

Apparently in Ephesus, the leaders were having problems discerning which women to assist, and which women should not receive assistance. More house rules apply to the family there, given here.

1. Whose hearts are burning with passion (1 Timothy 5:11-12)

It seems that there were younger widows who had pledged to be devoted to Christ, but then had grown physically restless with their widowhood, and so desired to break their vow (their *former faith/pledge*) to God to remain single.

2. Whose minds are busy with others' business (1 Timothy 5:13)

Young widows were going house to house spreading anti-gospel gossip and busy bodying—that is, getting into other people's business.

3. Have them marry, mom, and manage the home (1 Timothy 5:14-15)

This is interesting counsel that I've actually used before. Pastorally, we have had occasion to encourage younger widows to remarry. It can be hard to have those conversations, but is what is recommended here.

C. For widows with family in the church (1 Timothy 5:16)

1. Women must care for widows within her family.

It's not that men are prohibited from caring for their widowed mom, but it's just that practically, it's usually women who care for their moms in the day-to-day affairs of care.

2. This helps the church best help widows who are left alone.

There is more ink spilled on widows than on elders and deacons combined! The care of widows must really have been an issue for the church back then. And it still is today. Steve's thesis is right: the modern-day widow is not just the woman whose husband passed away, it is any woman who has been left alone without a husband—whether through death or divorce. These women are biblical widows, and their children are biblically fatherless. Considering the meteoric rise in divorces in the U.S. over the last 30 years, we must, as a church family, do our part to honor those widows in our midst here at NorthCreek Church. If you are a widow in need this morning—a single mom, a woman whose husband has passed away, listen, God is calling His church family to honor you. Why? Because of His heart for you [Steve's thesis, p. 33].

CONCLUSION

Living life in God's family means that we take care of the family—especially our most vulnerable members—widows. If you're a single mom/widow here this morning, know that we have many ministries—formal and informal—that provide care and support to you and for you (explain them). For the rest of us, let's get after what it means for us to honor and care for our widows in need.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Context

- What was the main point of the passage immediately before this week's passage?
- Are there logical or thematic connections to the passage from this week's sermon?

Observation

- Are there any major sub-sections or breaks in the text?
- Are there key connecting words (for, therefore, but, because) that indicate the logical flow of the passage?
- What is the main point or points? What supporting points does the author make?
- What surprises are there in the flow of the argument?

Meaning

- How does this text relate to other parts of the book?
- How does the passage relate to Jesus?
- What does this teach you about God?

Application

- What does this teach you about you?
- How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding?
- Is there some attitude you need to change?
- How does this passage call on you to change the way you live?