

1 Timothy Lesson 12

1 Timothy 5:1-25 – Honor in the Household of God

INTRODUCTION

Paul's letter to Timothy, composed around AD 63-65, addresses the practical functioning of the church in Ephesus, a city plagued by false teachings and social tensions.

Building on earlier chapters' focus on doctrine, personal responsibility, and leadership standards, chapters 5 and 6 delve into conduct within God's household, described as the pillar and support of the truth.

This section provides specific information. I was curious, so I did a comparison between Ephesians 4-6 and 1 Timothy 4-6. Both are written to the same general body, but some very clear distinctions will help us understand our text.

Ephesians deals with instructions on general principles for the ideal local assembly.

1 Timothy is specific, providing operational correction about local issues.

Ephesians provides the general "blueprint" for the household of God; 1 Timothy acts as a "corrective manual" for a church experiencing systemic breakdown.

INTERGENERATIONAL RESPECT IN THE CHURCH FAMILY (VERSES 1-2)

Paul starts with instructions on addressing different age groups, portraying the church not as a hierarchy but a household where correction stems from love and respect for all. The command against sharp rebuke highlights a relational approach; the Greek ἐπιπλήσσω (epiplēssō) suggests a harsh strike, which the English *sharply rebuke* or *address harshly* softens, since it's more like a verbal assault that could alienate and damage.

Instead, *appealing* as παρακαλέω (parakaleō) means to call alongside, urging with encouragement, take on the problems of life together.

Treating an older man as a father is Paul reframing what is normally a distant relationship through spiritual kinship. For younger men as brothers implies peer-level accountability.

Extending to women, older as mothers commands dignity, while younger as sisters, "in all purity" concerning moral boundaries. *Purity*, ἁγνός (hagnos), is an external display of the internal reality.

PRINCIPLES FOR CARING FOR WIDOWS (VERSES 3-8)

Paul commands honor for those truly in need, a vital concern in an era without welfare systems. *Honor*, τιμάω (timaō), encompasses material support, as English can imply mere respect since the root ties to assigning value, like compensating labor, clarifying that it is an active provision.

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To understand the detailed instructions in 1 Timothy 5, we must look at the Greek word *χήρα* (*chēra*), which essentially means "bereaved" or "left alone." In the Greco-Roman world of Ephesus, a woman's social and financial identity was tethered to a male protector, either a father, husband, or son. If a widow has family, they must provide first, practicing piety through provision. *Practice piety* is εὐσεβέω (*eusebeō*) and means reverent conduct toward God. Again, this reinforces that our behavior toward one another is our primary method of showing respect to God.

A widow without any support or resources was often forced into extreme poverty, begging, or wanton pleasure (to give oneself to pleasure) to survive.

The contrast of “dead while she lives” is a functional estrangement from God's purpose.

Prescribing these keeps the widows and the assembly above reproach, meaning beyond accusation, keeping the reputation of believers clean so that God is not mocked and the Gospel is not discredited.

Verse 8 sharpens the point: neglecting one's own, especially household, denies the faith and is worse than unbelievers.

Based on this verse, we can identify one of the problems. Widows were being neglected by believers and taking advantage of a program that had been set up by the church.

Provide is πρνοεῶ (*pronoeō*) and means thoughtful foresight in respect. The person who does not take care of their own lacks foresight and does not respect their family.

Denying the faith – the first thing we need to note is that this is “*the* faith,” which is defined as the body of doctrine as communicated by the prophets and the apostles. Some have concluded that *denying the faith* is equated to being an unbeliever. But we see that the person is “worse than an unbeliever,” which means he is a believer who is in rebellion.

Remember, the grace and gifts of God are irrevocable, but not taking care of your family repudiates the character and doctrines of God. “The faith” here also may be specific to the doctrines of this section (1 Timothy 6:3-5).

CRITERIA FOR CHURCH SUPPORT OF WIDOWS (VERSES 9-16)

Culturally, young widows were expected to remarry quickly to maintain the social order (Augustan laws even penalized those who didn't). Paul's concern is that younger widows were making pledges of celibacy to join "the list" for financial security, but then their natural desires would lead them to want marriage again, breaking their pledge to the church.

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The enrollment list outlines a system for sustained aid, but what kind of aid? This is likely simply food, clothing, and/or shelter (1 Timothy 6:7-8). The list also insisted they take ministry roles such as service to the local assembly and prayer.

Age sixty reflects cultural life stages, when remarriage was unlikely. "Wife of one man" is ἐνὸς ἀνδρὸς γυνή (henos andros gynē), which doesn't prohibit remarriage, but a character trait of fidelity, paralleling elder criteria.

Paul's preference for marriage, bearing children, and keeping house is οἰκοδεσποτέω (oikodespoteō), meaning ruling the home provides structure, giving pretext for reproach.

Some turned aside to Satan, deviation into opposition. There is a natural desire when one is younger to be married and have a family, especially in a society where family is the means for survival.

Believing women are also instructed to assist relatives, not burdening the church and overloading the assembly's resources or energy. This priority cycles: family first, church for isolated cases. Theologically, grace rejects quid pro quo; aid mirrors God's gift to believers but asks how to prevent abuse. Through discernment, ensuring generosity flows from belief's persuasion, not obligation. Historically, Ephesus' wealth gaps made this equitable, modeling God's justice without favoritism.

PRINCIPLES (VERSES 1-16)

The difficulty with this passage is not in the understanding of this passage but in the application of it. In our current society, culture, and economy, most widows are not financially destitute. Most churches do not have a list, so what do we do with this section?

1. The principle of spiritual dignity – even when correction is needed, believers should always love and respect, even those who are in error.
2. The principle of family responsibility - the primary obligation for social welfare lies with the biological family. The church should never usurp the role of the family, nor should the family abdicate its responsibility to the church.
3. The principle of qualified benevolence - church resources are not for indiscriminate charity. They are reserved for those who meet three criteria:
 - a. Destitution: they have no other support (no family).
 - b. Discipline: they have a track record of "good works" (hospitality, service).
 - c. Dependence: their hope is fixed on God (v. 5).

We can always be generous with a stranger, but sustained or repetitive help should be reserved for those who are of the household.

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HONORING AND PROTECTING ELDERS (VERSES 17-25)

Elders who rule well deserve double honor is διπλῇ τιμῇ (diplē timē), meaning amplified respect. This is usually taught as remuneration. But this involves the aspect of leading, teaching, and proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the honor is an act of respect, giving them the full benefit of listening to their instruction. Other uses of τιμῇ (time) – Romans 12:10; 1 Corinthians 12:24; 1 Timothy 6:1.

This does not mean that remuneration is not part of the topic; that is clear from Paul's use of Deuteronomy 25:4. *Do not muzzle the ox while threshing* indicates that those who work hard at leading, preaching, and teaching are "worthy of his wages." There is an obvious principle that those who sow spiritual things are worthy to reap physical things (Romans 15:27; Galatians 6:6; 1 Corinthians 9:7-14).

Accusations against elders require two or three witnesses, meaning don't accept baseless claims, protecting people who are often subject to jealousy and vengeance.

Those continuing in sin need rebuke, meaning public exposure to keep others from sin. Timothy is then encouraged not do anything with partiality. He needs to lead and teach responsibly, and if correction is needed, then do so with no regard for the person.

Verse 22 simply indicates that Timothy is not to endorse elders without scrutiny, otherwise he would share in their sin. Then concludes, keep yourself free from sin. *Free from sin* is ἄγνός (hagnos), which is actually pure. Verse 23 seems out of place, but this is most likely a correction to a misconception of purity. Both evil and good deeds are evident or cannot be concealed indefinitely. So let time tell if a person is of good character.

CONCLUSION

1 Timothy 5 serves as a corrective manual, treating the church as a family rather than a hierarchy. Paul instructs Timothy to correct members with respect, avoiding harsh rebukes. This family priority extends to widows: biological relatives must provide support first, ensuring church resources are reserved for those who are truly destitute and have a history of faithful service.

Regarding leadership, elders who rule well deserve "double honor," signifying both respect and financial remuneration. To protect leaders, accusations require witnesses, though verified sin necessitates public rebuke. Timothy is cautioned against hasty appointments, advised to let time reveal a candidate's true character before laying on hands.