

Honouring the Church as Family

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Date: 22 June 2025

Preacher: Tim Scoular

[0 : 0 0] Today's reading is from 1 Timothy 5, 1-6-2a, which can be found on the Church Bible on page 1193.

! The widow who is a mother, treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.

Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family, and so by repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.

The widow who is really in need and left alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help.

But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. Give the people these instructions so that no one may be open to blame.

[1 : 1 9] Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over 60 and has been faithful to her husband and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the Lord's people, helping those in trouble, and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.

As for younger widows, do not put them on such a list, for when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ, they want to marry.

Thus they bring judgment on themselves because they have broken their first pledge. Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house.

And not only do they become idlers, but also busybodies who talk nonsense, say things they ought not to. So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes, and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander.

Some have, in fact, already turned away to follow Satan. If any woman who is a believer has widows in her care, she should continue to help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so the church can help those widows who are really in need.

[2 : 5 0] The elders who direct the affairs of the church, well, are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.

For Scripture says, Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain, and the worker deserves his wages. Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses.

But those elders who are sinning, you are to reprove them before everyone, so that the others may take warning. I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and do nothing out of favoritism.

Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure. Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.

The sins of some are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them. The sins of others trail behind them. In the same way, good deeds are obvious, and even those who are not obvious cannot remain hidden forever.

[4 : 05] All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching shall not be slandered.

Those who have believing masters should not show them disrespect just because they are fellow believers. Instead, they should serve them even better, because their masters are dear to them as fellow believers, and are devoted to the welfare of their slaves.

This is the word of the Lord. To God. St. Silas, good morning. Great to be with you. My name's Tim. A real privilege to be opening up God's word.

Let's pray as we come to 1 Timothy 5 and 6. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are a God who speaks. You haven't left us by ourselves to work out who you are.

We don't have to guess. Because you've told us. You've given us your word. And we pray that as we come to these words, that Paul speaks to Timothy that you have included in your Bible to us.

[5 : 14] Would you speak to us? Mould us. Shape us. We pray. In Christ's name. Amen. It was my first ever growth group at St. Silas.

We were in the East End growth group, so we started with dinner, because that's what that growth group does. Don't get jealous, it's alright. And then we enjoyed some good time in God's word. We prayed for one another.

We did the things that growth groups do. And then we were just sort of hanging out afterwards and chatting. And at this point, there were two couples in the group who were very heavily pregnant. And so it was the natural point of conversation as they were sort of coming up to the big day.

And one member of our group, a man in his 60s, Malcolm, was talking about the blessing of children. And Alex, who was leading the growth group, was reflecting on Malcolm's words.

And he said, Malcolm, do you want to be Uncle Malcolm to our baby? And then the other couple, Tom and Ali, jumped in too and said, yeah, and for ours as well.

[6 : 22] And Malcolm sat there in silence. And the conversation carried on.

And about a minute later, Malcolm just said, Uncle Malcolm. I'll be Uncle Malcolm. And when the babies were born, Malcolm was one of the first faces in the home or in the hospital for a cuddle with baby Marcus and baby Lucas.

Now, Malcolm won't mind me telling you that his house will not win any awards for interior design anytime soon. But there are two things in his living room that make it a beautiful home.

There are two photo frames of him holding his adopted nephews. Isn't the church family a wonderful thing?

Only Jesus can bond people together like that. And that is what 1 Timothy has been all about.

[7 : 35] How the church functioning healthily is like a pillar holding up Jesus so all can see. How he is utterly different to anything else that this world has to offer.

And chapter 5 is all about how our relationships with one another do just that. There's an outline in your handout. There is hopefully an open Bible in your hand to 1 Timothy 5.

Let's jump in to point 1. The family tree you can't map. That's what the church is. I want to give you a quick overview for how the passage fits together because there are some things in our Bible reading that might have sort of jumped out to you a little bit or sounded a little bit funny or strange and so we've got to understand how the whole thing fits together.

Verse 1, Paul starts, So this is initially a command from Paul to Timothy but as we walk through the chapter we'll see that this is the pattern for all relationships in the church family.

How is he to relate to older men? He's to treat each of them as if they were his own father. How is he to relate to older women? Like each of them was his own mother.

[9 : 06] So right off the bat there is an equality with how the church ought to relate to older men and women in the household. But there's difference too. There's a certain robustness with how men talk to each other.

There's room for exhortation. Always done in love. It seems Paul wants Timothy in the church to be that little bit gentler with older women.

It's different talking to your mum when talking to your dad. So that's what Timothy used to do. He used to treat older men as fathers, older women as mothers.

How would then he respond to or relate to those who were younger than him? Well, you'd think sons and daughters, wouldn't you? But no, it's not sons and daughters. Brothers and sisters.

Because you don't treat anyone in the church as if you have authority over them. Again, there's equality and difference. If anyone is likely to be physically vulnerable in a church community, it's the young women.

[10 : 11] And Paul makes it explicit that they are to be treated with absolute purity. If you are a young woman, church should be the place where you are most honoured and respected by men.

It tragically is not always that way, but it should be. And so this is a family tree you cannot map. From Timothy's point of view, everyone older than him, he treats like a parent.

Everyone his age or younger, they're brothers and sisters. But from another person's point of view, well, it's different. Depending on their age. So for Aidan Coghill, he's 10 days old at St Silas.

His church family is only fathers and mothers. For my 99-year-old grandfather back in Sydney, his church are completely brothers and sisters.

Everyone is treating everyone else with as much honour as they possibly can. And that is the tone for this whole section from 5 verse 1 through to 6 verse 2.

[11 : 19] We go out of our way to honour one another. That's how the church household functions. And this isn't easy to see in our Bibles, but there's the same Greek word that underpins the whole thing.

So in verse 3, we read, give proper recognition. And that word is timir. It's like honouring. Give proper honour to this particular group of older women, the widows.

Verse 17 says, give honour, double honour, even, to the particular group of older men who direct the affairs of the church. 6.1 says that slaves are to give honour, translated as full respect, to their masters.

And so the consistent command through the passage is to honour one another. And that is true even when you need to have difficult conversations.

In a previous church, I was involved in this situation where there were two teenagers, a male and a female. The guy was a bit older than the girl and a few people had witnessed and heard him talking about this younger girl in a way that was inappropriate.

[12 : 37] There was no physical contact but it was something that needed to be addressed. It was worth talking to him about. And so I did that. I encouraged him to talk to his parents about it afterwards and as he debriefed with his parents, he decided that he wanted to apologise to the girl's parents who were aware of this as well.

And I agreed to sit in on the conversation. And it was a beautiful conversation because here was a 17-year-old young man owning his mistake and there was the girl's parents who affirmed their love for him, offered forgiveness.

Both parties were vulnerable as they sought to repair the family relationship. And the girl's mom at the end of the meeting quoted this verse, 1 Timothy 5 verse 2.

And she said to him, my prayer for you as you walk away from this whole situation is that you just know one thing, that you learn one thing. Treat younger women in the church with absolute purity.

That's the only thing I remember from that conversation. And I think it probably is for that boy too. Because it was said with tenderness.

[14 : 06] Not bitterness, but honour to her Christian brother. That's the tone that the family is to have with each other.

And so as we walk through this passage, it's like Paul is sketching outlines with pencil for how Timothy is to think about the relationships, the complex relationships that there are in a church family.

And then Timothy will then come in and colour in the sketch with the tone of honouring one another as he applies this pastoral wisdom in the church.

And so, Paul sketches out point two, the family needs you can't neglect. Verse three, give proper recognition, give proper honour to those widows who are really in need, but, now our impulse is probably that we don't like the word but there, we get nervous about what might come after a but when we say something like that, but, Paul is fighting here to ensure that the vulnerable, the truly vulnerable will be cared for.

Twice the New Testament displays the church setting up pastoral care structures in both times it's to care for widows. no one loved widows in the first century like the church did.

[15 : 39] This is a culture with no government benefits. Life was hard for many but particularly for women in this life situation. Without the church they had really nothing else.

There was a daily provision of food Acts tells us for those on the widows list. So if anyone doesn't absolutely need it well let's ensure that the support structures that might be otherwise in place for them are encouraged and continued like from their blood family.

So Paul says but if a widow has children or grandchildren these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents for this is pleasing to God.

The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help.

But the widow who lives for pleasure that is the comforts of this world is dead even while she lives. Now again this is the sketch throughout the passage there's like business like language from Paul to Timothy.

[16 : 51] It's not the tone that Timothy will take as he applies the pastoral advice. You can imagine when siblings are talking about putting one of their parents into a care home and there's a certain frankness that those siblings have with one another as they work out the best way to care for their elderly mum.

They need to be clear on what is really important because you've got to think with great clarity and then there's another tone that you take when you you walk your mum through that decision and bring her alongside.

This is the sibling to sibling chat that we're looking in on here and Paul says the best way to truly care for widows is to not treat everyone the same way but to make sure that the church cares for those who are truly trusting in God for their daily provision and Him alone because without Him they will greatly suffer.

as we reflect on these women who are trusting in God and who are prayerful can I stop at this point to address the older women in our congregation and I'm 34 so based on verses 1 to 2 I suppose anyone older than that is who I'm talking to.

You are so valuable to us and you are particularly precious to us when you model putting your hope in God and praying because many in this building have never had a mother who did that and yet your quiet faithful model means that in the church they do.

[18 : 41] So thank you. We love you. We need you. Keep following Jesus faithfully. Verse 9 No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over 60 has been faithful to her husband and is well known for her good deeds such as bringing up children showing hospitality washing the feet of the Lord's people helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.

I love verse 9 I love verse 9 because verse 9 says that someone was managing the Excel spreadsheet in the church in Ephesus church suite was alive and well in the first century but really it's a reminder for us that church administration that task is always pastoral it's always done to care for people and it's important that we give the right resources to church administration and the right people for it because it really is a complex task rarely do pastoral situations generate simple or straightforward responses they're always messy and so for leaders in a church it's not like anyone anytime someone comes to you with a pastor and lead they get half an hour of pastoral care it's individual where there's different needs you've got to weigh up all of these things all of the complexity and so the response from verse 9 and 10 is better there's actually some systems there's processes that we should be guided by as we handle difficult complex pastoral situations it's a good thing to mobilize the church body to care for their mothers and fathers and their brothers and sisters and actually sometimes the most genuinely loving thing that you can do is encourage people to reframe the way that they're thinking it's like

Paul outlines here verse 11 as for younger widows do not put them on such a list so it seems that the list of widows were women who had sort of made a pledge before God of some sort that they would remain in that state and Paul says don't consign yourself young women to that state for life for halfway through verse 11 when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ they want to marry thus they bring judgment on themselves because they've broken their first pledge besides they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house and not only do they become idlers but also busybodies who talk nonsense saying things they ought not to some of us might wonder whether Paul said something he ought not to in that sentence but it's not we're sketching an outline here remember this is not the tone that Timothy will take as he employs it

Paul is concerned to genuinely care even if it's unpopular to genuinely care for younger widows here and the phrase in verse 13 at the beginning there says that they get into the habit of they get into the habit of the idea is that if they're not cared for appropriately and disciplined appropriately that they will learn idleness and they will learn to be busybodies because there are no healthy expectations for them in society or in the church he's already specifically said in the letter that he wants women to learn he sees women as disciples in the church worthy of as much honor as men and so he wants to genuinely care for them and in this situation that means taking on as much responsibility as they can for their own life living life under their own steam that's healthy living it's healthy

Christian living so verse 14 I counsel younger widows to marry to have children to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander take responsibility for your life as you are able so Paul has commanded Timothy to honor a specific subset of mothers in the church and then he turns his attention to a specific subset of fathers in the church and we're so used to talking about elders in church land as those who hold the office as elder rightly so but because we're used to that we can misunderstand this a little bit so let me just walk you through this in verse one do not rebuke an older man harshly the word for there is just elder but it's rightly translated as just the older men verse 17 the same word is the elders so the older men but a particular subset of the older men is the older men who direct the affairs of the church and that group are worthy of double honor if they do it well especially when it comes to teaching and preaching so they are due the honor that everyone receives so that every older man receives as a father but then the specific honor that comes for those who are set aside for this task and that includes things like financial provision and verse 18 steps that out and because of the public nature of their role the fact that they are sort of held up as being worthy of emulation these elders are to be held to account verse 19 do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses

[24 : 41] But those elders who are sinning you are to reprove before everyone so that the others may take warning now verse 19 doesn't mean that private sins against one person should be ignored any serious accusation should have a serious investigation but I take it that what Paul has in mind here are complaints that are general character weaknesses of these elders who are preaching and teaching so if for example a group of people go to the vestry at St Silas and they say hey we've seen Tim down at the pub on a few Friday nights and he's been drinking too much well then I should be confronted in that I should be corrected in that I should be stood down if it is serious enough that's the appropriate course of action and it should be made public so that others can take warning other elders can take warning of that that the whole church can take warning of that if this person who you're giving double honour to is not worthy of that well you should know so it's complex you can see how we handle these different situations it's complex for pastoral care it's complex for leaders in the church it is a good thing to be praying for the staff team and to be praying for vestry as they make decisions about how they carefully lead a church especially a growing church with many complex needs because the church family is beautiful but it has many needs they can't be neglected brings us to our final point the family status you can't escape have a look at verse one all who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect there's that honour word again so that

God's name and our teaching may not be slandered now slavery is one of those words that rightly makes our ears prick up and we wonder what's sort of going on here in our society because as we come to it what comes to mind is the transatlantic slave trade we think about cultural imperialism colonialism all these things racial oppression but all of those things happened after the first century so we need to be careful when we think about what actually is being spoken about in the context of a first century letter like this it would be historically inaccurate to load all of our assumptions onto that so for example slave trading the buying and selling of slaves is outlawed in chapter one of one timothy as something that is on the list of reprehensible actions so what is the slavery here that is part of the household well in a civilization and a society with no bankruptcy laws you needed a way to handle people who are unable to pay off their debts and the answer was to pay off your debts as a bond servant as a slave you became part of the household of the person who you were indebted to now some were treated very poorly but Christians were to treat slaves as brothers that's what we see here there's that honoring language in verse one full respect so what that means is that slaves were members of the household members of the church they're addressed in this way they're given that dignity and therefore if their masters are

Christians well then their masters are either their brothers in Christ if they are younger than them or they're their fathers in Christ if their master is older than them verse 2 those who have believing masters should not show them disrespect just because they are fellow believers instead they should serve them even better because their masters are dear to them as fellow believers literally fellow brothers and are devoted to the welfare of their slaves and so slaves and masters in the church family are to treat each other with honor because of the status that slaves have and the status that masters have brothers in Christ brothers in the household of God but what about the slaves who weren't treated rightly who had

Christian brothers for masters right this is all well and good but how is it fair to command slaves to treat the church as family if the family vibe is not reciprocated to them first for that matter how do I continually honor other people that's exhausting especially when my experience of church may have been one where I am not honored God if you were the mom of that teenage girl and you know what this boy has said about your precious daughter how do you not retaliate in defensive suspicion where is Timothy supposed to get the resources from to continually pour himself out honoring the church family like this the answer is the cross of

Christ because in the world you only get honor from how others treat you but it's different in the church in the world if you are treated with shame you don't honor that person but it's different in the church because there's only one way into the church and that way in is to know that in thought word and deed you like I have brought shame to our heavenly father and that he responded by sending his son to die in your place so that he might honor you once more Timothy has an extra little helping hand in remembering this the Greek word that we've seen as the structure for our passage timir is the first half of his name timir theo honored by God

[32 : 09] Timothy you can imagine Timothy's grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice holding this newborn baby just like uncle Malcolm did with Marcus and Lucas and Eunice looking at this little boy who she was born into the church family and with theological conviction know that because of Christ's work on the cross the father's desire to adopt his children into his family is made possible and because of her boy and calls him honored by God Timothy and whatever your name is that is true of every child adult widow elder slave or master in the church in Christ you are honored by God it's the only way in and so when you're tempted to be harsh with a brother or a father think first of how your brother

Christ treated you on the cross and if you're tempted to dishonor a mother or a sister think first of how right now Christ is honoring you not ashamed to call you his sister his brother because when we consider that how can we have any other tone in our church family than one of costly sacrificial love let us pray heavenly father we're so thankful for Jesus we are so thankful for him because we know the price that he paid that we might be honored by you and we pray that the cross would have such a transformative effect on us that it does change our day-to-day interactions with one another may we be a place may

St Silas be a church family that holds up Jesus and that everyone who interacts with us anyone who visits on a Sunday anyone who watches from the outside we'll look at the way we interact with each other and say Jesus is mighty we pray all of that in his name amen