

Caring for the Family of God

The church isn't a place you go to. The church is a Family. It is the "household" of God.

In **1 Timothy 5** Paul is setting some rules for the house.

v. 5: "Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity."

Note the "Family" language used: father, brothers, mothers, sisters

Historical context: Roman society was built around the "family."

Family included:

- Wife, Children, Grandchildren
- Slaves and Freedmen
- Clients and sometimes business and property

Paterfamilias: At the head of every household was the father. Each family was ruled by the "father of the household." The household existed to advance the honor, legacy, and prosperity of the father. Everyone served the household. The household served the father. In Rome: the household existed to preserve the legacy of the father by protecting the position and power of the father.

Paul expands and redefines the family and the value of each person in God's family.

- In Christ we belong to one Father.
- So, we treat each other as family- Fathers, brothers, mothers, sisters.

In Christ's family: the household exists to honor the Father by expressing the love of the Father.

➤ Side Note:

The Pastoral role isn't given for Power
People in the "pew" are not pawns
Character > Charisma > Purity > authority

Questions:

1) **Who would the paterfamilias naturally invest resources in?**

- People who "strengthened" the household
Sons, Heirs, Productive workers, Future grandchildren (preferably males)

2) **Who would be valued the least?**

- Those who consumed resources without contributing to the legacy of the father.
At the top of that list would be Elderly widows.

Paul is about to turn society up-side down because the Gospel turns the world upside down.

He writes, **"Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need."** (1 Tim 5:3)

"honor widows" ... something that has never been uttered before in the Roman Empire.

- **Note:** Paul is going to offer two qualifications for "honoring widows."
- He is going to put parameters around "need."
 - He is going to give a list of qualifications for establishing a revolutionary "ministry" position.

"⁴ 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. ⁵ 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. ⁶ But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. ⁷ Give the people these instructions, so that no one may be open to blame. ⁸ Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." (1 Timothy 5:4-8)

Paul wanted to make sure that the church used its resources wisely to help those who truly had no other option- the widows who had only God to hope in and no one else.
So if a widow had the help of a believing family. They were to help.

This command comes with a clear warning. Look again at **verse 8**.

"Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

- **Note:** the Christian who has a widow in the family and refuses to help because the widow no longer has anything of "value" to offer is worse than an unbeliever. The unbeliever never even had a faith that would cause them to re-orient their mindset toward the poor, the widows, the marginalized around them.

The "believer" who doesn't care isn't just denying the value and worth of the widow but denouncing Jesus, Himself.

Jesus Himself said, *"whatever you did to the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you did or did not do for me."*
(see Matthew 25:40)

The second thing Paul does is he sets up some qualifications for belonging to this order of widows.

The qualification isn't based upon "Need."

The qualifications are based upon character.

Verse 9: *"No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, 10 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."*

Note: There is a parallel here with the "offices" of elder and deacon Paul has already established.

Paul doesn't simply say, "take care of widows" he says "let a widow be enrolled" if she meets certain qualifications- and the main one repeated twice is being known or recognized for her good deeds that includes helping and serving others in need.

Historical context:

1st Century: Paul writes to Timothy elevating widows as a special class with qualifications

2nd Century: Ignatius of Antioch writes of widows as a recognizable group along with bishops, elders, and deacons.

3rd Century: The "Apostolic Teaching" (Didascalia Apostolorum) highlights the ministry of the "order of widows."

It includes:

- Continual intercession/prayer
- Fasting
- Visitation of the sick and care for women in need
- Mentoring younger women

The church didn't sideline widows because society said their purpose was over. It highlighted widows because they had become uniquely valuable.

➤ **Note:** Roman culture asked, "What value does this person bring to me and my household?"
The Gospel invites us to ask, "How can our 'family' restore a sense of value to this person?"

- The Gospel doesn't simply change our eternal destination.
- It resets our earthly vocation. We are called to live differently.
- Value isn't based on "usefulness" of others.
- Value is inherent because of shared relationships and identity.

Paul then adds some clarification on qualifications found in **verses 11-15**

"¹¹ 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. ¹² Thus they bring judgment on themselves, because they have broken their first pledge. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander. ¹⁵ Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan. ¹⁶ 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 that the church can help those widows who are really in need."

Question:

What is Paul communicating here? Especially verse 12- "thy bring judgment on themselves for breaking their first pledge?"

It cannot be, they broke their original marriage pledge by remarriage. Paul encourages remarriage here. We find that a person is free to remarry upon the death of a spouse in several other passages, most notably **I Corinthians 7:39**
"a wife is bound to her husband while he lives. If her husband dies she is free to remarry anyone she wishes as long as he belongs to the Lord."

Most likely he is referring to the pledge she has made to be a part of this order of widows- to devote her life in prayer and helping those in need. She is young enough to still have children, to raise a family. She has energy where she wants to still have fun in life. Paul understands the reality of life. He is setting younger women free.

➤ Side note: I appreciate Paul is a realist about life.

- 1) The longing for companionship and joyful experiences in life. Better to remarry than spend your time seeking physical pleasures outside of marriage or living a life devoid of any real meaning except going from one cocktail party to another. By the way, Paul isn't forcing anyone over 60 not to remarry. It isn't a requirement that all widows over the age of 60 join the "Widowed order." He is simply setting a parameter for protection.
- 2) Paul is real about what real help is and what it isn't. Paul says, the church isn't required to help those widows who have believing family. And, he is saying that those widows who can help themselves should... either by the financial means they already have or by remarrying. In fact, to help those people isn't really helping them. It is enabling them.

When helping becomes harmful...

I confuse love with being happy by keeping someone happy

Vs.. Willing and working to help someone be the best version of themselves

God loves us enough to "help" us even when it "hurts" us.

We are to love people the same way.

Finally:

Ultimately the Emperor Julian failed. He is known as the Julian the Apostate in history because he was the last of the pagan Emperors. Paganism failed because ultimately 1) the priests were reluctant to take away resources from their own religious communities and their personal pockets to help others. 2) the pagan world never adopted it. It praised generosity when giving was to those who could enhance reputation and status. It was frowned upon if it didn't.

Christianity ultimately won the hearts and minds of people not through recruiting the powerful and giving them more power. (Historians tell us that probably 2/3rds of the early church consisted of women and those who were slaves or freedman probably comprised almost ½ of the rest of the congregation.)

It ultimately won the hearts and minds and conquered Rome because it refused to look like Rome.

When the church had no "political power" it was powerful. It looked like Jesus. It embodied what God intended Family to look like.

When the church gained political power it became more "pagan." It looked like Rome and resorted back to the model of paterfamilias.

When we start to mirror the power structures that Christianity originally challenged we lose ourselves and ultimately we lose whatever "culture war" we think we are fighting because we are no longer embodying Jesus in service, love, and humility.

The church is the place where people should experience this Kingdom.

The church is the place that offers an alternative to the culture around us.

The church is the place where...

- widows became ministers.
- Slaves became siblings
- Leaders became servants
- Because we are all brothers and sisters