

FIRST TIMOTHY

Chapter 5

Advice About Widows, Elders and Slaves

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.³ Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need.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, too, so that no one may be open to blame.⁸ If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.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 saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.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 gossips and busybodies, 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 family, she should help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need.¹⁷ The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.¹⁸ For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages."¹⁹ Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses.²⁰ Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning.²¹ I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism.²² Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.²³ Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.²⁴ The sins of some men are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them.²⁵ In the same way, good deeds are obvious, and even those that are not cannot be hidden.

5:1–6:2 Paul writes as though reviewing a manual for ministry. Early Christians compiled such “church rules” (e.g., the *Didache*) after the manner of such documents in Judaism (e.g., The Community Rule in the Dead Sea Scrolls). The problems Paul warned against developed in later monasticism. Regarding Paul’s method of instruction, Ambrose notes, “The first exercise in training the soul is to turn away sin, the second to implant virtue” (*NPNF* 2 10:393). (TLSB)

5:3–16 Paul refers to three distinct classes of widows: (1) those over 60 with financial support available from family; (2) those over 60 with family support not available (“really in need” vv. 3, 5, 16); (3) those under 60. (CSB)

5:1–2 *rebuke*. A note of harshness and severity is associated with the Gk word. (TLSB)

father ... brothers ... mothers ... sisters. Timothy is to regard believers, regardless of age or gender as if they were members of his own family—a practice also taught by Jesus (Mt 12:46–50). (TLSB)

purity. This is a realistic word of caution on sexual purity for Timothy and other ministers as they deal with younger women. (TLSB)

5:3 *Give proper recognition to those widows*. Probably means taking care of them, including the giving of material support. Widows were particularly vulnerable in ancient societies because no pensions, government assistance, life insurance, or the like were available to them. (CSB)

Not only with respect, but also with material support. Paul also uses this word when he quotes the Fourth Commandment in Eph 6:2. Jesus taught that honoring parents included provisions of material support (Mt 15:4–6). (TLSB)

truly widows. Those who qualify to receive support from the congregation who have no other means for support, as vv 4–16 make clear. Cf Ac 6:1–6.(TLSB)

5:4 *show godliness to their own household*. The faith of a widow’s children or grandchildren should find expression, first, within the family, ensuring that the widow’s needs are met.(TLSB)

some return. Material and/or financial repayment for all the care the children have received from their parents. (TLSB)

5:5 *supplications and prayers night and day*. A widow’s continuing prayers express the hope she has placed in God. (TLSB)

5:6 *dead even while she lives*. Dead spiritually while living physically. (CSB)

Although physically alive and living luxuriously, the self-indulgent widow is spiritually dead. (TLSB)

5:8 *does not provide*. Material support for the truly needy. *household*. (TLSB)

denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. Not caring for one's family was considered highly contemptible. Even unbelievers may instinctively care for their family. (TLSB)

5:9–10 *enrolled.* Qualified widows (vv 9–15) were apparently selected to receive the church's assistance on a permanent basis. (TLSB)

sixty years of age. Considered very old in the first century. (TLSB)

one husband ... reputation. Widows whose earlier life was characterized by marital faithfulness would not bring shame to the congregation (TLSB)

5:9 *list of widows.* The requirements included: (1) being over 60 years of age; (2) having had a faithful monogamous married life, or perhaps literally having had only one husband (see NIV text note here and the implication for the parallel requirement for overseers/elders at 3:2; the Greek reads, "one husband's wife"—note the emphasis in the word order). The church in Ephesus seems to have maintained a list of widows supported by the church. While there is no evidence of an order of widows comparable to that of the overseers, it appears that those on the list were expected to devote themselves to prayer (v. 5) and good deeds (v. 10). (CSB)

5:10 *washing the feet of the saints.* A menial task, but necessary because of dusty roads and the wearing of sandals (see Jn 13:14). (CSB)

5:11 *younger widows.* Young enough to remarry. (TLSB)

passions. Romantic desire. (TLSB)

marry. Remarried widows would be supported by their husbands. (TLSB)

5:12 *broken their first pledge.* Perhaps when a widow was added to the list she pledged special devotion to Christ, which would be diminished by remarriage. Or Paul may be referring to the believer's basic trust in Christ, which a widow would compromise by marrying outside the faith. (CSB)

faith. The Gk term for "faith" may be understood as an "oath" or "solemn promise" in this context, if they had promised not to remarry or to abide by the Christian faith and teaching. (TLSB)

5:13 *idlers ... gossips ... busybodies.* Younger widows without a father, husband, children, or job would be prone to social problems, which would burden the supporting congregation. (TLSB)

5:14 *the adversary.* The definite article makes this a likely reference to the devil, esp in view of the reference to "Satan" in v 15. The devil, however, often carries out his adversarial work through human accomplices. (TLSB)

5:15 *Satan.* See notes on Zec 3:1; Mt 16:23; Col 3:5. (CSB)

Fallen into temptation, sin, and unrepentance. (TLSB)

5:16 *believing woman*. Perhaps a directive for young widows of means to extend care to additional widows in the family. Or, perhaps the woman is singled out here because the woman of the household would be the most likely to provide care for widows in a domestic, first-century setting. (TLSB)

care ... burdened. Assuming responsibilities that God has primarily assigned to family members. (TLSB)

5:17 All elders were to exercise leadership (3:4–5) and to teach and preach (3:2), and all were to receive honor. But those who excelled in leadership were to be counted worthy of double honor. This was especially true of those who labored at teaching and preaching. (The Greek word translated “work” refers to toil.) That such honor should include financial support is indicated by the two illustrations in v. 18. (CSB)

A term quite similar to “overseer” (3:1–7) (TLSB)

rule well. The Gk term includes active leading, directing, and exercising care and concern for others. (TLSB)

Double honor. Just as widows are deserving of “honor” (v 3), so are elders. “Double” here indicates that the honor due the elders encompasses honor both in the sense of reverence and also in the sense of an honorarium or compensation. “Those who want to be Christians are obliged in God’s sight to think them worthy of double honor who minister to their souls... They are obligated to deal well with them and provide for them... Those who keep God’s will and commandment in sight have this promise: everything they give to temporal and spiritual fathers, and whatever they do to honor them, shall be richly repaid to them” (LC I 161–62, 164). (TLSB)

5:18 *Scripture*. The use of this term for both an OT (Dt 25:4) and a NT (Lk 10:7) passage shows that by this time portions of the NT (or what ultimately became a part of the NT) were considered to be equal in authority to the OT Scriptures. (CSB)

Paul quotes both the Mosaic Law and our Lord Himself to show that pastors should be compensated for their work. (TLSB)

Qualifications for Elders/Overseers and Deacons

Self-controlled	ELDER	1Ti 3:2; Tit 1:8
Hospitable	ELDER	1Ti 3:2; Tit 1:8
Able to teach	ELDER	1Ti 3:2; 5:17; Tit 1:9
Not violent but gentle	ELDER	1Ti 3:3; Tit 1:7
Not quarrelsome	ELDER	1Ti 3:3

Not a lover of money	ELDER	1Ti 3:3
Not a recent convert	ELDER	1Ti 3:6
Has a good reputation with outsiders	ELDER	1Ti 3:7
Not overbearing	ELDER	Tit 1:7
Not quick-tempered	ELDER	Tit 1:7
Loves what is good	ELDER	Tit 1:8
Upright, holy	ELDER	Tit 1:8
Disciplined	ELDER	Tit 1:8
Above reproach	ELDER	1Ti 3:2; Tit 1:6
(blameless)	DEACON	1Ti 3:9
Husband of one wife	ELDER	1Ti 3:2; Tit 1:6
	DEACON	1Ti 3:12
Temperate	ELDER	1Ti 3:2; Tit 1:7
	DEACON	1Ti 3:8
Respectable	ELDER	1Ti 3:2
	DEACON	1Ti 3:8
Not given to drunkenness	ELDER	1Ti 3:3; Tit 1:7
	DEACON	1Ti 3:8
Manages his own family well	ELDER	1Ti 3:4
	DEACON	1Ti 3:12
Sees that his children obey him	ELDER	1Ti 3:4–5; Tit 1:6
	DEACON	1Ti 3:12
Does not pursue dishonest gain	ELDER	Tit 1:7
	DEACON	1Ti 3:8

Keeps hold of the	ELDER	Tit 1:9
deep truths	DEACON	1Ti 3:9
Sincere	DEACON	1Ti 3:8
Tested	DEACON	1Ti 3:10

5:19 *evidence of two or three witnesses.* A safeguard designed to protect elders against false charges. This practice has ample biblical precedent (cf Mt 18:16; 2Co 13:1). (TLSB)

5:20 *Those who sin.* The context indicates that Paul is speaking of the discipline of elders. (CSB)

Some continued to commit sins for which they had been rebuked privately. (TLSB)

rebuke them in the presence of all. Although some sins would preclude an elder from continuing to serve in that office (cf 3:2–3), Paul prescribes a public rebuke to move them to repentance and help them amend their lives.(TLSB)

all. Could refer to the other elders or to the entire congregation. (TLSB)

fear. The public rebuke of a guilty elder is intended for the good of all, namely, to foster a holy fear of sin and its consequences. (TLSB)

5:21 *presence.* As ministers of the Gospel, both Paul and Timothy carried out their work by the command of God and Christ Jesus (cf 1:1). Their invocation here (together with the angels) is a solemn reminder to Timothy of his great responsibility to keep all that has been entrusted to him. (TLSB)

elect angels. Chosen angels, in contrast to Satan and the other fallen angels. (CSB)

Not found elsewhere in the Scriptures. Contrasts God’s own chosen angels with the fallen angels (2Pt 2:4; Jude 6) (TLSB)

these rules. Lit, “these things,” the requirements set forth in vv 19–20. (TLSB)

5:22 *Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands.* Paul is speaking of the ordination of an elder, which should not be performed until the candidate has had time to prove himself. (CSB)

To help prevent situations where elders require discipline and rebuke (v 20), a suitable amount of time should pass before a man is set apart as an elder. (On identification of “elder,” see note, v 17.) Additional time allowed church leaders to review the quality of a man’s character. (TLSB)

do not share in the sins of others. Do not ordain a person unworthy of the office of elder. (CSB)

Keep yourself pure. Probably refers to refusal to become involved in the ordination of an unworthy man. (CSB)

Timothy could preserve his innocence and integrity by heeding Paul's admonitions (e.g., 4:12; 5:23; cf Ti 1:15). (TLSB)

5:23 *Stop drinking only water.* A parenthetical comment in Paul's discussion of elders. In view of Timothy's physical ailments, and perhaps because safe drinking water was often difficult to find, Paul advised him to drink a little wine. (CSB)

A personal note, not an excuse for drunkenness. Clearly, news of Timothy's ailment had reached Paul. Timothy may have been under a Nazirite vow, abstaining from wine (see notes, Ac 21:26; Nu 6:1–21). Alcohol in wine inhibits illness brought on by bacteria or parasites. (TLSB)

5:24–25 *sins of some men ... good deeds.* Paul advises being alert to hidden sins as well as to good deeds in the lives of candidates for ordination. (CSB)