Being Responsible

Believers should care for others, including widows and ministers.

1 Timothy 5:1-8,17-21

Most of us realize that a church is not a shrine for morally perfect people. It is full of people like you and me who are often messy, careless, confused, selfish, and desperately in need of forgiveness and correction. With all our relational challenges, we sometimes fail to minister and communicate respectfully and mercifully. Thankfully, God provides clear instructions about how to treat people in needy situations and pastors in leadership.

What role should the church play in caring for the needs of people in the community?
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

1 TIMOTHY 5:1–6:2

Paul’s desire to see the church in Ephesus thrive is obvious by the details he gave Timothy. As a young pastor, Timothy faced a steep learning curve. Paul offered him guidance about several significant matters. The first involved advice about relating to a wide age range of church members (1 Tim. 5:1-2). Paul wanted Timothy to give gentle correction of an elderly believer, as if pleading with a father. On the other end of the age spectrum, Paul advised Timothy to lead younger men as brothers. Similarly with women, Paul instructed Timothy to approach older women tenderly as mothers and treat younger women respectfully as sisters.

Paul also gave Timothy instructions about caring for widows (5:3-16). He pointed out that believers had a responsibility to care for a widowed family member. Widows without family support needed help from the church. Some widows, however, did not qualify for church support.

Given that the immediately preceding context deals with widows, one could easily think that Paul’s instruction in verses 17-22 also involved the older men. However, this section specifically refers to persons who preach and teach. Paul outlined several ways Timothy and the church should relate to these spiritual leaders, including how to deal with pastors who had been accused of wrongdoing.

In verses 22-23, Paul interjected some personal instruction for Timothy. Because of Timothy’s health problems, Paul advised him to mix some wine with the water he typically drank.

Carrying over into the opening verses of chapter 6, Paul offered guidance for how believing servants and masters should relate to one another. In all these relationships, Paul emphasized responsible behavior that honored the Lord.

As you read 1 Timothy 5:1-8,17-21, look for reasons behind Paul’s instructions. How does knowing why we do something help us complete the task?
EXPLORE THE TEXT

RESPECT ALL (1 TIM. 5:1-2)

1 Don’t rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters with all purity.

VERSES 1-2

As a young pastor, Timothy faced the challenge of leading men and women of various ages. Paul knew that part of Timothy’s leadership involved confronting unacceptable attitudes and actions among believers. Regarding Timothy’s approach toward elderly men, Paul gave two guidelines. First, Timothy should not rebuke an older man. The word rebuke in this context referred to a severe tongue lashing. Paul was not suggesting that an older man’s rude disposition or disruptive deeds should be ignored. Instead, he was instructing Timothy not to engage in verbal rage toward a senior believer. Contempt toward a member of God’s family must be avoided.

Second, a mature man was to be exhorted as a father who deserved respect. Such an approach would uphold Timothy’s role of pastoral leadership and reduce relational friction. The manner in which Timothy dealt with an older man was as significant as the message he spoke.

Similarly, Paul reminded Timothy to engage younger men as if they were his beloved brothers. Timothy needed to treat them with respect and affection. Whenever they needed correction he was expected to give it without pompous censure. As a leader Timothy did not have to choose between firmness and tenderness. He could demonstrate both effectively for the health of the church.

Likewise, Paul offered two guidelines for Timothy to follow as he ministered to women at Ephesus. First, Timothy was to relate to older women as mothers. Second, Paul wanted Timothy to treat younger women as sisters. Specifically, Timothy was to maintain a standard of purity and avoid sexual immorality. By viewing the opposite sex as members of God’s family, Timothy would provide healthy and holy leadership. When confrontation was necessary, Timothy was to do so in a manner that honored both older and younger women in the church.
How does the way we approach a person impact his or her willingness to listen? How can a person balance sternness and love?

KEY DOCTRINE: The Christian and the Social Order

All Christians should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick (Col. 3:12-17).

CARE FOR WIDOWS (1 TIM. 5:3-8)

3 Support widows who are genuinely in need. 4 But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them learn to practice godliness toward their own family first and to repay their parents, for this pleases God. 5 The widow who is truly in need and left all alone has put her hope in God and continues night and day in her petitions and prayers; 6 however, she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. 7 Command this also, so that they will be above reproach. 8 But if anyone does not provide for his own family, especially for his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

VERSES 3-7

Caring for widows is prominently emphasized in the Old Testament (Ex. 22:22; Deut. 24:17,19; Ps. 68:5; Isa. 1:17). Paul impressed upon Timothy not only the responsibility of caring for widows, but the effective management of a ministry on their behalf. Apparently, the burden of care-giving had strained the congregation in Ephesus and necessitated clarification about the qualifications for support. Although our English word widow refers to a woman whose husband has died, the Greek word for widow describes a woman who may have lost her husband by death, incarceration, or desertion. Some widows had financial resources left to them by their deceased husbands. Some received support from their extended family. Widows who were destitute and without family support for daily provisions were classified as true widows in need of help from the church.
How does the care of widows within a church serve as a testimony for Christ in the larger community?

A widow’s children or grandchildren were expected to care for her needs. By taking responsibility for her well-being they would practice godliness and provide tangible proof of their devotion to Christ. The demonstration of godliness and compassion within the family context authenticated three attributes: a genuine faith, gratitude toward a mother or grandmother, and a pleasing service to the Lord.

In contrast to the widows who were genuinely in need of support, Paul implied that some widows did not qualify for church support. This was especially true for a widow who was self-indulgent. She was described as being dead even while she lives.

Paul was establishing the case for discernment and wisdom in utilizing church resources for widows. To support a widow who clearly traveled the path of self-indulgence would not only represent unwise stewardship, it would also enable the widow to continue in her sin. Consequently, Paul expected Timothy to teach the congregation and warn the widows. If the congregation would honor and support the true widows, and the widows would avoid sinful behavior, and family members would act responsibly toward a widowed mother or grandmother, then neither the widows nor the church could be blamed for negligence or for impropriety. Furthermore, the gospel would not be discredited.

VERSE 8
Believers who could provide for their families were obligated to do so. Even an unbeliever in Paul’s world understood the need to provide for his own household. A believer’s failure to care for his own family indicated two things. First, that the person had denied the faith. This didn’t mean that a believer lost his salvation. It meant that a believer’s behavior repudiated his professed belief. Second, that he is worse than an unbeliever. If unbelievers practiced responsible care-giving in their households, but believers failed to do so, then it would appear that the morality of those who rejected the gospel was superior to those who professed Christ. Paul’s admonition was a stern rebuke. It was also a firm reminder of the importance of demonstrating Christian love in the family.
Where is the line between family expectations and church responsibility?
How can they partner in a way that is fair to both?

BIBLE SKILL: Compare similar passages.
Read 1 Timothy 5:9-16 and jot down some of the requirements Paul made for widows who received church benevolence. Read the article on widows in the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary or in a similar resource. Compare this article and Paul’s instructions regarding ministry to widows with the following Scriptures: Deuteronomy 10:18; 24:20-21; 26:12-13. Based on what you read, what could your church do to fulfill scriptural expectations for ministry to widows in your church?

CARE FOR PASTORS (1 TIM. 5:17-21)

17 The elders who are good leaders are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says: Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain, and the worker is worthy of his wages. 19 Don’t accept an accusation against an elder unless it is supported by two or three witnesses. 20 Publicly rebuke those who sin, so that the rest will be afraid. 21 I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels to observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing out of favoritism.

VERSES 17-18
Paul emphasized that leaders are to be financially supported and treated with respect. By the term •elders, Paul was referring to pastors who had the responsibility of overseeing church ministries and preaching the gospel. Pastors in Ephesus, like pastors today, had an obligation to fulfill their calling from God. Consequently,
pastors who are good leaders should be considered worthy of financial support. Double honor does not mean double pay. Paul was, however, urging the church to be generous. Paul called attention to pastors who work hard at preaching and teaching because the task of effectively communicating the gospel was a labor-intensive ministry. Preaching involved more of a public proclamation of the gospel. It was peppered with exhortation and evangelization. Teaching involved ethical instruction. It was accentuated with reason and explanation. Both preaching and teaching are to exalt Christ, edify believers, and evangelize the unsaved. The twin tasks done effectively were worthy of financial support and respect.

Paul quoted from the Old Testament to support his instruction. The command, Do not muzzle an ox, was found in the Mosaic Law and pertained to the care of oxen while they threshed grain (Deut. 25:4). Oxen were yoked to wooden poles attached to a circular millstone. As they plodded, the millstone would grind the grain. To muzzle the oxen prevented them from enjoying some of the grain. They were to be allowed the opportunity to eat because of their work and their worth to the owner. Paul’s point was that pastors should be sufficiently compensated for their work in the gospel and their worth to the Savior’s mission.

Paul also cited Jesus’ words that the worker is worthy of his wages (Matt. 10:10). If a laboring ox was rewarded for its work, a pastor should be supported for his labor.

Do you believe it is more difficult or easier to lead a church today than it was thirty years ago? Give examples to illustrate your response.

VERSE 19
All pastors are flawed individuals. None are above criticism, and none are beyond being falsely accused. Some accusations may be legitimate and require examination. Other accusations can be spurious and arise from impure motives that require dismissal. Paul was well aware that conflicts were common in churches. He personally understood the emotional agony and the damage resulting from false accusations. Paul was not advocating
preferential treatment for pastors. He was recommending fair and unbiased examination. Consequently, he urged the rejection of unsubstantiated charges against a pastor. The verb *don’t accept* is an imperative instructing Timothy to cease and desist frivolous complaints. There was a real danger that the integrity of a leader’s life could be discredited and the ministry at Ephesus damaged by slander. The term *accusation* is a translation of a Greek word conveying a public denunciation. Such accusations against a pastor were not to be received without clear and warranted corroboration.

The condition for acceptance of charges had to be based on *two or three witnesses*. Paul supported his instruction by grounding it in the Old Testament stipulation that multiple witnesses were necessary to consider the accusation (Deut. 17:6; 19:15). Once the charges were received, a thorough investigation of the allegation and a gathering of evidence could be presented.

**VERSE 20**

If church members continued to engage in sin, Paul expected Timothy to *publicly rebuke* them. The purpose of the rebuke was to call attention to the sin and to discipline the guilty person so that other believers might also *be afraid*. A reverential fear of accountability before God can be an acceptable motive for avoiding sinful activity.

**VERSE 21**

Timothy was likely timid about his assignment. Nevertheless, he was charged to do it. The phrase *I solemnly charge* carried the idea of intense testifying. Paul earnestly testified that Timothy absolutely must carry out the task. Moreover, the witnesses to Paul’s plea and Timothy’s responsibility were *God and Christ Jesus* and the heavenly host of *angels*. Timothy was charged with the responsibility of confronting the guilty persons and making sure that any investigations of wrongdoing were conducted *without prejudice* or *favoritism*. No one was to receive special treatment, regardless of their popularity, giftedness, or power. The rebuke was to be balanced with grace.

*What factors may make a pastor or church leader an easy target for a false accusation? How can a church practice the actions called for by Paul?*
IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers are to treat each other as respected family members.
- Believers are to help take care of the needs of faithful believers who face life alone.
- Believers are responsible to God for the support they provide their pastoral leadership.

As a group, identify principles from today’s study for addressing each other over sensitive matters. What actions need to be implemented as a result of this discussion?

Reflect on the responsibilities you have for others as a member of a family and of a church. What actions do you need to take to better care for the people in your family and in the church who are unable to care for themselves?

Memorize 1 Timothy 5:25. Consider ways you express gratitude and generosity to your pastoral leaders. What actions do you need to take to encourage your pastor and church leaders?

Prayer Needs