

1 Timothy 5

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[0:00] You're probably aware that the Bible uses several different metaphors to describe the church. If you think of the way the Bible is described, the church is described in the Bible as a body, isn't it?

A kind of building that God is erecting. Sorry, it's a picture of a body in which Christ is a head. A different part of the body, a different role to play.

Some places it's a picture of a bride, and it's the bride of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it's Christ's most precious wife. But probably the most dominant picture metaphor in the Bible is the preeminent way that the Bible invites you and I to think about church.

Is that a spiritual family? Of a spiritual family? It seems to me that in London people have invented a number of other different metaphors to describe church.

And they're quite prevalent in our thinking, but they're not actually biblical. So there's the tradition way of thinking, isn't there? That is, people do what they've always done. They go to church just because their family has always done it.

[1:10] There's the tradition way of thinking. It's where being seen in church is as important as participating in the service. There's certain ways of doing things.

They are really prized. There's a traditional way of doing things. Most prominent, I think, in London is the concert way of thinking. The concert way of the church. Where the church really is absolutely great entertainment.

It gives you a kind of boost. A kind of spiritual shot of cocaine every Sunday. And you have a great experience. And really, all that happens at church happens up front.

And you are the spectators. And the music is slick. And the preaching, well, that's even slicker. And the vibe, well, it's just great.

So upbeat. It's slickly engaging from the beginning to the end. But there's also the church, a self-help group, isn't there? It's where the churches seem to be the place where you can go to get help with your problems.

[2:12] Where community is so important. Where the ministry of the church is really to scratch where I'm at church. And then I think there's a more subtle way of thinking about church, which is that of friends.

Where church becomes the place where you can begin and nurture friendships. Where people float towards relationships with other like-minded people.

And they enjoy being around them. And people feel comfortable. There's a casual set of relationships which kind of come and go. Now, don't misunderstand me.

There's a little bit of truth in each one of those, isn't there? Tradition is absolutely vital. It's absolutely vital in churches. And churches often are at its best when what is done at the front is done well.

Church ought to be a place where you and I are encouraged to tenderly face up to the problems that life throws at us. Church also should be a place where wonderful friendships flourish.

[3:12] And yet isolating them, as this is what church is, falls way short of the Bible's mark. They all fail to do justice to the obligations and the depth of relationships.

And the sincerity that the Bible says should be a hallmark of Christian churches. They all, in various ways, serve to undermine the church as family.

And that is why I think it's really vital that you and I think biblically about church. And we understand this family metaphor. And not only do we understand it, but we seek to live our lives in the light of it.

So let's start with the family in verses 5, verse 1 and 2. In this case. Paul says to Timothy, Do not rebuke an older man, but encourage him as he were the father. Younger men as brothers.

Older women as mothers. Younger women as sisters in all purity. So here we see that understanding the church as family will have quite radical implications for the way we understand relationships within the church.

[4 : 18] And Paul addresses Timothy, and he asks him to think about all the directions that a leader relates to others. To older men, to younger men, to older women, to younger women.

So there are, in these verses, particular implications for those who are Christian leaders. But what he says has got broad application to every Christian. And what I want to suggest is the necessity of seeing each other at church as family implies two things.

It implies both intimacy and restraint. Intimacy and restraint. So in the first place, intimacy. So you notice that Paul doesn't tell Timothy to treat older men as he would his boss at work.

He doesn't tell him to treat older women as he would his old headmistress. Nor does he say, treat younger men like some bloke that you met at the pub last week.

Or treat younger women like you would the girl who saves you coffee in the morning. Now he speaks of treating the people around him like he would treat his father, his mother, his brothers and his sisters.

[5 : 25] And that suggests, doesn't it, a certain closeness. Fathers and their sons. Daughters and their mothers. They're all to have a relationship of love.

So do siblings. So do mothers and their daughters. Now of course, as I look around this room, that is not what's the case, is it? But it ought to be.

And when Paul uses the metaphor to describe the truth, he wants to imply a measure of intimacy in our relationships. But I want to suggest to you that the metaphor also implies restraint as well as intimacy.

And Paul makes this really clear. Particularly in the case of when he deals with older men, but also with younger women. Notice he says in verse 1, if an older man needs to be rebuked for some sin, he must not be rebuked harshly.

For as exhorted as a son would do to his father. I don't know whether you've ever had to pull your dad up about something in his life. But it's not an easy thing to do at all, is it?

[6 : 37] When it's happened in our family, the kind of three brothers have kind of argued about which brother is the best one to address my father. I live the furthest away. And so they always say, well you're the youngest, you do it. I don't know whether you ever had to do it.

It is incredibly painful to do it. And it's something that needs to be done, isn't it, with deep respect, profound humility and extreme care.

Notice Paul says younger women should be treated as sisters with absolute purity. He sees the relationship between a brother and sister in which intimacy is coupled with restraint.

And again, it's a question of respect and care. And I hope you see, don't you, as you think about this, how instructive the family metaphor is. It teaches you the virtue, the wonder of Christian affection.

But also the virtue of respect. It teaches you the value of warmth in a church family. As well as holiness. It teaches us that we ought to really deal with each other tenderly in our church.

[7 : 45] But at the same time, we mustn't become complacent or take liberties or fail to honour people as we should. It teaches us that our relationships in IPC ought to be marked by intimacy and restraint.

Now as I said, given Timothy's position in Ephesus, this will have special relevance to those of us who are in church leadership. We're to pay special attention to this instruction.

Because our leadership depends upon it. But nevertheless, it is relevant to every single one of us in the church. And in many senses, our church family depends upon this too.

So our relationships at IPC, in order to be healthy, need to be marked by intimacy and restraint. On the one hand, we mustn't fail to show restraint.

And so if we're guilty of failing to show proper respect to those who are older, or those who are over us in the law, then we've got to confess our sin. And we've got to start treating our more mature members of our spiritual family with more care and more honour.

[8 : 59] That may involve how we touch people. That may involve how we speak to people. It will certainly involve how we think about people.

Our relationships as brothers and sisters ought to be characterised by purity. But on the other hand, we mustn't fail to pursue proper intimacy either. Even if we're respectful to our elders.

But we're not showing true Christian love to them. If there's no genuine affection, or genuine concern in the way we treat them, we need to repent of that.

Our older men are our fathers in the faith. And our older women are our mothers in the faith. And we ought to treat them with that kind of intimacy.

So too we, as we relate in the fellowship, as young men to other young men. Or young women to other young women. Or young women to young men. Do we primarily see each other as brothers and sisters?

[10:07] Or is our affection and kindness to one another motivated by the fact that we see each other as a potential partner? Or primarily, if we're younger, as a kind of object of desire.

Or someone to be avoided. It happens in church life, isn't it? An unwanted suitor. And it's as we treat each other with affection and purity, we actually make ourselves more attractive to one another and we make our fellowship more attractive to an over-sexed, unrelationally destitute society.

Before we leave verses 1 and 2, we've got to hold these two things together. Intimacy and restraint. Affection. Warmth.

With respect. Intimacy without restraint will make us worldly and ungodly. Unrestraint without intimacy will see us live our lives in loneliness and emptiness.

But here is a vision of what a church can be in London. And what a precious gift it is when it operates like this. This is a vision of a church that is warm and holy.

[11:24] More warmth. More warmth. More warmth for its holiness. And more holy for its warmth. It's God's genius, isn't it? It's a Christian family.

And this is what Paul longs for us to be. It's what I long for it to. And I hope you do as well. Now from verses 3 to 16, Paul turns his attention to one of the four groups that he's just mentioned.

The widows. And in these paragraphs, he reflects how Timothy and the church as a whole should treat older women. From verse 17 onwards, he moves to older men.

But here he's thinking about older women in the congregation. And he hones his attention on those who've lost their husbands. The special case of widows. And in verse 3, he reveals that it's not even all widows that he's most concerned about.

But in verse 3 again, he says, give proper recognition give proper recognition on the widows who are truly widows. Truly widows.

[12:30] Give proper recognition to those widows who are truly in need. Paul is concerned about the neediest of widows. And at the outside, he wants to be clear that there is proper recognition for those who really, truly depend on the church.

And what he's doing in these verses is helping distinguish between those needy widows who the church must care for and other widows who don't need to be cared for by the church. Now, of course, if you've read your Bible at all, you'll know that God's concern for widows is unquestionable. Right the way through the Bible, all the way through the Bible, widows are mentioned alongside aliens, those are internationals, and the poor. Those three groups are always there.

The aliens, the Bible talks about them, that just means people from another land, the widows, and the poor. And God repeatedly calls his attention to their need.

But here, Paul makes it clear, doesn't he, that the church has got to be selective. Can you just see that? That is Paul's assumption. Paul assumes that the church cannot afford indiscriminate welfare.

[13:45] The church in Ephesus then, just like the church now, has got limited resources. And the church then, as it is now, is not fundamentally a welfare association.

Churches have been through history, Christians have been through history, and ought to be today at the forefront of caring and showing mercy. But churches themselves do not exist for that purpose.

And so Paul is at pains to point out who the church should help and who the church should not help. And over the course of these verses, Paul spells out the qualifications of those widows. And he believes the church should care for.

But look at verse 4, he focuses attention, first of all, on the group that the church should not care for. These are widows with children and grandchildren.

Look at verse 4. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first then show godliness for their own household, and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God.

[14:46] Paul is teaching you and I that there's a very real sense in which we owe our parents and grandparents a debt. And it pleases God when we repay that debt.

And he says it ought to be a natural outworking of our religion, of our faith in Christ. Paul thinks that widows who have living Christian children or living Christian grandchildren should have their own needs met by their own family.

Look again at verse 8. But if anyone does not provide his or her relatives and especially for members of his own household, he's denied the faith and he's worse than an unbeliever.

It's hard to imagine Paul being stronger than this. And in fact, I've been shocked by the language of verse 8 this week. This is clearly an area of life which matters to God a great deal, isn't it?

And that may be shocking to you and I because so many of us don't consider the way that we care for our families particularly for our parents and our grandparents to be an issue of huge spiritual significance.

[16:03] But according to Paul it is. True faith in the Lord Jesus will lead naturally to the godly and sacrificial care of our relatives.

Failure to care for our relatives leads Paul to think that you haven't put your faith in Christ at all. And then in verse 16 Paul rounds the section out and he underlines the central principle in the responsibility of children and grandchildren.

Do you see what he says there in verse 16? If any believing woman as relatives are widows let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened so it may care for those who are truly widows.

The verses prior to this Paul has been talking about the conduct of widows directly and he finishes by addressing widows presumably women who are now married or single.

I don't think that he's saying that this isn't the responsibility of men. Okay? But he's wanting at this point in this passage to speak to women especially. And he's saying again that there are widows with family those who are widows with family who can care for them the burden should not fall to the church.

[17:15] I'm making it sound much more complicated than it is. Alright? It's a responsibility that a family can carry. Now thirdly just notice there are some widows who should be excluded from the church's care altogether.

Can you see them in verse 5? She who is truly a widow left all alone has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day.

So here Paul contrasts the widow who trusts in God with the widow who doesn't. And the implication is that only the first kind of widow should come under the provision of the church's limited resources.

Verses 9 to 15 Paul expands on that distinction and then in verse 9 Paul actually speaks of a list. It seems in Timothy's day the church in Ephesus actually kept a list a list a kind of register of qualified widows.

You see the church's care for widows was certainly not ad hoc or whimsical it was carefully thought through and they had a system of care where the church's obligations were spelt out but if Paul also wants to make it clear what widows qualified for this list and which were to be excluded so look at verse 9 let a woman be enrolled if she is not less than 60 years of age having been the wife of one husband having a reputation for good works.

[18:45] So first of all there's an age limit as to who gets on the list. Obviously those over 60 were more likely to be genuinely needy and they also I suspect lived long enough to demonstrate their faithfulness described over many years.

And Paul is looking for godly and mature Christian women from this list not just anyone who had a need not just anyone. And so if you are a younger woman here this morning can you see the picture painted of a godly mature woman that you might want to aspire to?

But the reason Paul only wants mature and faithful women to be placed on this list becomes more obvious in the next paragraph of verse 11. But refuse to enroll younger widows for when their passions draw them away from Christ they desire to marry and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their form of faith.

Besides that they learn to be idlers going about from house to house and not only idlers but also gossips and busybodies saying what they should not. So I would have younger women marry, bear children, manage their household and give the adversary no occasion for slander.

Now these verses are not particularly easy to interpret as lots of one Timothy is but if you look at verse 12 some incur condemnation for abandon their former faith.

[20 : 08] What it's talking about there? He's talking about a pledge. Now that would have been obvious to Timothy it's not so obvious to us 2000 years later where you've got to kind of reconstruct it.

But it could be the case that widows were placed on a list and they made a certain promise to remain in marriage so that they could dedicate themselves to the service of the church. They were kind of older church workers.

And in this case we're talking about a double pledge that was made in two directions. The church pledged to care for the needy widow and in return the needy widow pledged to care for the church. And such a widow would be set apart for special care. She'd be set apart for special service. Now if that is the situation that Paul is commenting on, the fact that there were widows younger than 60 being placed on the list, who found that their desires got the better of them, and in order to marry they had to break this promise that they made to remain single and serve the church, they had to go back on their first pledge.

Now that perhaps is what Paul is saying. There's another interpretation that the pledge could be translated faith as it is in the ESV. And in that way Paul is talking about widows who are falling away from the faith altogether.

[21 : 22] And so they're becoming like the widows he describes in verse 6. And those widows should never be the responsibility of the church. Now it's not easy to know what Paul had in mind. But either way Paul thinks younger widows should be left off the list because of the spiritual temptations they face.

And if the younger widows give in to those temptations the integrity of the church's system is compromised. He expands on it doesn't he in verses 13 to 15.

which we just read. And clearly some have fallen into the verse 6 trap. So Paul's advice for younger widows is that they be excluded from the church's register of needy widows and if they are able to marry again they should do so.

Now I realise this morning has not been me at my most exciting in my preaching. Alright? But I want you to notice something. I want you to notice the importance of the home.

Alright? Look at verse 10. The faithful widow is known for her hospitality. For her faithfulness for her children. For the care of her children. And again in verse 14 the young widows are encouraged to pursue this kind of life.

[22 : 30] It's got echoes of chapter 3 verse 4 and 5 and verse 12 of chapter 3 isn't it? Where we learn that church leaders must be proven in the home before they can take on leadership in their spiritual family.

Don't miss this. It's a big theme in 1 Timothy. We live in a world where the home is considered a private matter. And where what happens in the home is not actually that huge and significant.

We live in an age where people's contribution to society is measured in terms of what they do when they leave the home. But as a church we need to stand against our culture in that respect.

Caring for children. Caring for elderly parents. Caring for grandparents. To a degree our society doesn't money that as much as it should. But we ought to be different.

And we ought to remind those who are married and those who are parents in our midst that their home matters as much as their work does. And ungodliness at home is a matter of deep spiritual significance.

[23 : 37] And neglect of the home in favour of work is a matter of deep spiritual concern. This passage reminds us that the home matters a great deal to God.

And so it ought to matter a great deal to us. It is a high privilege to be a mother in the kingdom of God. It's a high privilege to be a father in the kingdom of God.

It's high privilege to be a grandparent in the kingdom of God. I want to draw some conclusions.

Particularly I want to look at two things. One, our responsibility as a church, and then particularly our responsibility as children and grandchildren.

First, our responsibility as a church. It's a great reminder we live in a society much like every other society through history. A society where it's very easy for widows and people like them to be marginalised and neglected.

If you go into any nursing home in London, you have to sign the visitor's book. Have you done that? And when you go into the visitor's book, just look at the dates. And look at the number of people who visit.

[24 : 47] If you spend any time in any nursing home anywhere in our city, you will find plenty of people who are lonely and who feel like their families, they've got them, have stuck them there to get them out of the way.

There is no shortage of older people in our city with real needs. And that is true of churches too. And what this passage encourages us to do is to treat older men like our fathers.

And to treat older women like our mothers. It's where there are people who are in real need we ought to help. Paul does say, doesn't it, he does very clearly say we need to be discerning.

The church cannot meet the need of indiscriminate welfare. we ought to distinguish between those who have a track record of faithfulness in the service of God and those who don't trust God.

That is, we ought to work out who is in the family. And more than that, we ought to distinguish those who have natural families to care for them. And those who don't. And we ought to distinguish between those who are younger and needy and those who are unlikely to find marriage again.

[26 : 00] But when we've been discerning, God calls on us as a church family to take our responsibility very seriously indeed. That as we become aware of a need financial or otherwise, we make others aware of this need so that they can be met in the context of our Christian community.

We have deacons. It's the job it is to show mercy. Who knows, maybe we should start a list like the Ephesian church did. Whatever we do, Paul wants to remind us that we are family and we ought to be like one.

We ought to act like one. So here is the cause to take up our responsibility as a spiritual family. And Paul, well let me just stop there for a moment, there is huge danger in London, isn't there, I think.

Because there are so many good churches. And so we can travel in, we can pick our flavour of meth. And so there have been churches in London, which have, haven't they, a wonderful preacher, who has preached and drawn people in from all over London.

And then he leaves, he retires, and what happens? Well, there can be splintering, can't there? But I want to say to you, if I drop dead tomorrow, this church is family.

[27 : 21] Now for a sermon like this, you're not coming for the preaching anyway. family. But we are family. And we ought to act as a family. This passage also calls us to take up our responsibilities within the natural family.

And this is part of the genius of the Bible, isn't it? Although in Christ we have a new and a higher loyalty to a spiritual family that takes on great significance for every Christian, nevertheless, this new loyalty doesn't undermine, but only strengthens our loyalty to the families we were born into. What Paul teaches here is that because of our supreme love for Christ, that Christians ought to be known for serious and growing love for their families. And so, you and I need to feel the weight of these stern verses in this chapter that address you and I as children and grandchildren.

we need to hear Paul's call by providing for parents and grandparents in need and so repaying our debt to them. And this pleases God.

And a failure to do so disgusts God. And I think that verse 8 makes that pretty clear. We need to please God, children, in the way that we love our mums and dads and grandparents.

[28 : 48] But I also want to say to you, there are great examples within this church family. You don't have to go far to see great examples of that being done in this church.

I'm not doing it. It's not easy though, is it? It's not easy though, as as with elderly parents, not to feel undrift into impatience resentment.

It's not easy, is it? We often feel that we need a kind of break from this strenuous love. Paul reminds you and I that it is a basic Christian duty and it reminds us that when we do love our relatives, when we do love our parents who are driving us slightly mad, it brings great pleasure to the heart of God.

And if we are not really on the ball with this responsibility then we need to make changes. And if you have parents or grandparents who need you and you are just getting on with life, paying little or no attention to them, then Paul's warning here, well it should put the wind up you a little bit, shouldn't it?

Because you are neglecting something that is quite precious to the God whom you serve. And I know there are many of us who with relatives that are in different parts of the world and you are

going to have to work hard to try and apply this yourself.

[30 : 18] So there you have it. This section is all about loving family. Paul has laid out for us the privileges and responsibilities of people who belong to two families. Do you know that? The family we were born into and the family we were reborn into if we come into Christ.

And he's reminded us that coming to Jesus has all sorts of implications for how we love and honour both these families. And indeed he's shown us in verses 3 to 16 what verses 1 and 2 look like in practice.

He's shown us how serious he is about us understanding ourselves as a church family and acting like them. Chiefly he has reminded you if you are a Christian you are part of a community.

A community that is not primarily about tradition. We are not primarily about experience. We are not primarily about getting help. We are not even primarily about friendship. We are a community that under God is a family.

And we are called to love and honour those in our family with great intimacy and respect. With generous care and thorough self discipline. And I trust that as a church community we will be keen to put this into practice because we know the message of 1 Timothy don't we?

[31 : 35] that it's as we live like this that we commend the godly and quiet life that God has called us to. That God wants all people to be saved and to come to acknowledge the truth and that when we live and when we love like a family we are an incredibly attractive advertisement to the world for the Lord Jesus.

And that ought to make you and I very keen to put this teaching in practice. But even more than that I hope that we want to put this into practice because the one who calls us to it is our perfect heavenly father.

And the one who brought us into this family is our elder brother the Lord Jesus Christ. And if we ever needed a reason and a pattern for love then his life and his death and his majestic lordship are enough.

They are enough to sustain you for a lifetime of service to others. And that is where we find the motivation and that is where we find the strength to meet all the responsibilities of a life lived in the service of the Lord Jesus.

This is what Paul wrote in chapter 1 and verse 14. He said this and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

[33 : 07] Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.