

NOON BIBLE STUDY: 1 TIMOTHY 5 (PART 1)

ON THE HEELS OF PAUL'S DIRECTION TO TIMOTHY AS A YOUNGER LEADER IN THE CHURCH, HE WILL NOW TAKE SOME TIME TO DISCUSS WHAT WE COULD CALL "FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS" AMONGST GOD'S PEOPLE. THESE VERSES WILL INCLUDE DIRECTION REGARDING TIMOTHY'S (AND CHURCH LEADERS IN GENERAL) INTERACTION WITH THE CHURCH, BUT ALSO GIVE GUIDANCE FOR THE CHURCH AS A WHOLE IN LIGHT OF HOW WE SHOULD THINK OF ONE ANOTHER AND HOW WE SHOULD INTERACT WITH ONE ANOTHER.

ONE PASTORAL NOTE BEFORE WE PROCEED: MANY OF US COME FROM BACKGROUNDS WHICH WOULD NOT INCLUDE "HEALTHY FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS" AS A DESCRIPTOR. WHEN WE HEAR THAT WE SHOULD TREAT OLDER MEN IN THE CHURCH AS "FATHERS" WE MAY BE THINKING OF AN UNGODLY FATHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIP. WHEN WE HEAR THAT WE'RE TO CONSIDER EACH OTHER AS "BROTHERS AND SISTERS", THAT MIGHT CARRY WITH IT SOME DYSFUNCTIONAL HISTORY.

GOD ISN'T CALLING HIS PEOPLE INTO A BROKEN OR UNHEALTHY FAMILY - HE IS CALLING US INTO (AND TO BE) A LOVING AND DEVOTED FAMILY UNIT - UNITED BY OUR COMMON FATHER WHO ADOPTED US AS HIS OWN. THIS FAMILY LANGUAGE ISN'T JUST A CUTE METAPHOR OR SPECIALIZED LANGUAGE - WE ARE A SPIRITUAL FAMILY CHOSEN BY GOD. THE NEW TESTAMENT ASSUMES THIS IS TRUE AND THEN GIVE US THE WAY TO INTERACT AS A FAMILY UNIT.

1 TIMOTHY 5:1-2 - FAMILY RELATIONSHIP DEFINED

HONOR OLDER MEN AS YOU WOULD A FATHER. HONOR OLDER WOMEN AS MOTHERS. THINK OF YOUNGER MEN AS BROTHERS AND YOUNGER WOMEN AS SISTERS - AND INTERACT WITH THEM AS SUCH.

Q - WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR OUR INTERACTIONS WITH AND COMMITMENTS TO ONE ANOTHER IN THE CHURCH?

Q - AS A CHRISTIAN, HOW SHOULD YOU TREAT YOUR MOTHER AND FATHER?

Q - AS A CHRISTIAN, HOW SHOULD YOU TREAT YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS?

"DO NOT SHARPLY REBUKE AN OLDER MAN..." - TIMOTHY IS BEING INSTRUCTED TO HONOR AND RESPECT THE OLDER MEN IN HIS CHURCH AS FATHERS, EVEN IF/WHEN HE HAS TO CORRECT THEM AS THEIR PASTOR. THE NEW LIVING TRANSLATION SAYS "NEVER SPEAK HARSHLY TO AN OLDER MAN, BUT APPEAL TO HIM RESPECTFULLY AS YOU WOULD TO YOUR OWN FATHER...(1 TIMOTHY 5:1A NLT)."

IT CAN BE A COMPLEX SITUATION WHEN YOU, AS A YOUNGER PERSON OR AS A CHILD BEGIN TO SEE ERROR OR SIN IN YOUR PARENTS. IT MIGHT BE TEMPTING TO ATTACK OR CONFRONT WITH DISRESPECT BECAUSE OF ALL THE TIMES YOU WERE CONFRONTED AS THEIR CHILD - BUT LOVE IS NOT RUDE AND THE CALL TO "HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER" DATES BACK TO THE 5TH COMMANDMENT THAT THE LORD AUDIBLY SPOKE GENERATIONS AGO! THERE IS A WAY TO CONFRONT OR ADDRESS SOMETHING WHILE MAINTAINING RESPECT AND HONOR. IT IS CONTINGENT ON EACH OF US TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO DO THAT WELL.

PAUL ENCOURAGES TIMOTHY NOT TO "SHARPLY REBUKE" BUT TO "APPEAL TO THEM." ONE IS HARSH AND HURTFUL, THE OTHER IS ROOTED IN THE GREEK WORD MEANING TO CALL SOMEONE TO YOUR SIDE (*PARAKALEO*) - THAT'S A DIFFERENT MIND PICTURE THAN CALLING SOMEONE OUT.

HOW WE TREAT EACH OTHER IS REALLY IMPORTANT. HOW WE CARE FOR THE OLDER AMONG US IS IMPORTANT. HOW WE INTERACT WITH THE YOUNGER AMONG US IS IMPORTANT. WE HONOR THE OLDER PEOPLE IN OUR SPIRITUAL FAMILY AND WE TREAT THE YOUNGER WITH SIBLING LOVE. TIMOTHY IS ALSO CHARGED SPECIFICALLY TO TREAT THE YOUNGER WOMEN WITH SISTER LIKE PURITY. NEITHER THE CULTURE NOR YOUR EARTHLY FAMILY SHOULD NOT DETERMINE OUR FAMILY INTERACTIONS - GOD'S LOVE AND A CHRIST-LIKE SPIRIT SHOULD.

1 TIMOTHY 5:3-8 - WIDOWS INDEED & HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITY

THE BIBLE HAS A LONG AND CONSISTENT PRACTICE OF CARING FOR WIDOWS, ORPHANS AND OTHER PEOPLE WHO ARE VULNERABLE. (A WIDOW IN ITS MOST BASIC DEFINITION IS A WOMAN WHOSE HUSBAND HAS DIED). PAUL IS REAFFIRMING THE PRACTICE OF CARING FOR WIDOWS IN THE CHURCH AND OUTLINING THE DOS/DON'T AND IFS/THENS THAT MAY BE RELATING TO THEIR CARE. HERE'S WHAT PAUL IS GOING TO SAY:

- 1 - HONOR WIDOWS IN GENERAL.
- 2 - WIDOWS WHO HAVE CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN OR OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS SHOULD BE CARED FOR BY THEM (V. 3, 8)
- 3 - WIDOWS WITHOUT CHILDREN/FAMILY SHOULD BE CARED FOR BY THE CHURCH FAMILY - IF AND WHEN THEY ARE DEVOTED CHRISTIANS. THIS IS WHAT PAUL CALLS A "WIDOW INDEED" (AKA TRULY A WIDOW) (V. 5, 9-10)
- 4 - YOUNGER WIDOWS WILL NOT NECESSARILY BE INCLUDED IN THIS CARE BUT SHOULD CONSIDER REMARRYING. (V. 11-16).

SOME OF THIS IS GOING TO HAVE A CULTURAL ELEMENT TO IT, FOR EXAMPLE WOMEN WOULD RARELY WORK INDEPENDENTLY OUTSIDE THE HOME. IN OUR MODERN CONTEXT SOME WIDOWS ARE NOT IN NEED BECAUSE THEY WERE NOT FINANCIALLY DEPENDENT ON THEIR HUSBANDS TO BEGIN WITH OR WERE SET UP FOR THEIR FUTURE BY THEIR HUSBAND OR THEIR OWN WORK (SOCIAL SECURITY WASN'T A THING IN THE ANCIENT WORLD.). IN THE ANCIENT WORLD, ESPECIALLY IN A JEWISH CONTEXT FAMILIES WERE MULTIGENERATIONAL AND INTERDEPENDENT. IF YOUR FATHER WAS A FISHERMAN, YOU WERE A FISHERMAN WORKING FOR YOUR FATHER AND EVENTUALLY TAKING HIS BUSINESS WHEN/IF HE WAS UNABLE TO WORK. YOU WOULD EARN MONEY FOR YOUR FAMILY THROUGH FISHING AND ALSO MAKE SURE YOUR PARENTS WERE CARED FOR. THEN YOUR SON WOULD DO THE SAME. AS A SPIRITUAL FAMILY, WE'RE BEING ASKED TO THINK OF EACH OTHER IN A SIMILAR WAY, THOUGH NOT BASED ON BIOLOGY.

1 TIMOTHY 5:9-16 - ADDITIONAL DETAILS ON WIDOWS INDEED

LET'S CONSIDER SOME OF PAUL'S POINTS MORE CAREFULLY:

1 - FAMILIES SHOULD CARE FOR EACH OTHER, SPECIFICALLY CHILDREN CARING FOR THEIR PARENTS WHEN POSSIBLE.

V. 4 - IT'S RIGHT FOR CHILDREN TO HELP AND CARE FOR THEIR PARENTS TO "REPAY" THEM FOR THE CARE THEY SHOWED THEM AS CHILDREN.

V. 8 - IF YOU DON'T HELP PEOPLE IN YOUR FAMILY, YOU'RE "WORSE THAN AN UNBELIEVER". IN OTHER WORDS, HELPING/CARING FOR THE PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE IS A BASIC CHRISTIAN VIRTUE. IF YOU DON'T DO THIS, YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND THE WAY OF JESUS.

PAUL WANTS TO NOT HAVE THE CHURCH BE BURDENED FINANCIALLY WHEN IT IS NOT NECESSARY. CHRISTIANS PRACTICE GENEROSITY TOWARDS THE CHURCH AND IN GENERAL. THERE SHOULD BE FUNDS AVAILABLE BY CHURCHES TO CARE FOR CHURCH MEMBERS IN NEED AS A PART OF THE COLLECTIVE SUPPORT GIVEN BY CHURCH MEMBERS. IN CASES WHERE FAMILIES CAN CARE FOR THEIR PARENTS, IT WOULD BE WRONG FOR THE CHURCH TO EARMARK FUNDS IN THAT DIRECTION.

2 - OLDER, FAITHFUL CHRISTIAN WIDOWS WITHOUT FAMILIES ARE THE PRIORITY

THAT'S A MOUTHFUL. WE'LL GET TO THE AGE-BASED POINTS NEXT. PAUL IS GIVING DETAILS WHICH RELATE TO WHO SHOULD BE HELPED/CARED FOR. FOR A WIDOW TO BE SUPPORTED BY THE CHURCH SHE MUST NOT HAVE A FAMILY THAT CAN HELP AND ALSO MUST HAVE A HABIT AND REPUTATION OF FAITH IN GOD AND SERVICE TO OTHERS. PAUL SPECIFICALLY MENTIONS A FEW QUALITIES:

WIDOW INDEED QUALITIES:

- FIXED HER HOPE IN GOD (V. 5)
- CONTINUES IN ENTREATIES AND PRAYERS NIGHT AND DAY (V. 5)
- OVER 60 YEARS OLD (V. 9)
- FAITHFUL TO HER HUSBAND (V. 9)
- REPUTATION FOR GOOD WORKS, FOR EXAMPLE, RAISING HER CHILDREN, SHOWED LOVE TO STRANGERS (HOSPITALITY), WASHED THE SAINTS FEET (LOVED CHRISTIANS), ASSISTED THOSE IN DISTRESS, DEVOTED HERSELF TO EVERY GOOD WORK (V. 10).

DISQUALIFIERS:

- GIVES HERSELF TO WANTON PLEASURE (V. 6) - SELF-INDULGENT, LIVING FOR THIS WORLD, LIVING FOR PLEASURE
- ALSO, ASSUMING SHE REMARRIES OR CAN BE CARED FOR BY HER FAMILY

3 - YOUNGER WIDOWS DO NOT NEED TO STAY THAT WAY

YOUNGER WIDOWS AREN'T TO BE IGNORED, BUT THEY AREN'T TO BE ON THE "WIDOWS INDEED" LIST. THE THINGS ADDRESSED IN THIS SECTION ARE INTERESTING AND COMPLICATED. IN GENERAL IT SEEMS PAUL IS HOPEFUL THAT YOUNGER WOMEN WHO CAN GET REMARRIED TO GODLY MEN, SHOULD - RATHER THAN THE CHURCH SUPPORTING THESE WOMEN. AGAIN, CULTURALLY, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN UNUSUAL FOR A WOMAN, ESPECIALLY A YOUNG WOMAN, TO BE "SINGLE FOR LIFE." THAT'S MODERN REALITY RELATIVELY UNKNOWN TO THE RECIPIENTS OF THIS LETTER.

PAUL IS DISCOURAGING A YOUNG WOMAN FROM BEING SUPPORTED BY THE CHURCH ONLY TO LIVE A SELFISH AND WORLDLY LIFE. A YOUNG WOMAN WHO IS HELPED BY THE CHURCH (PROBABLY TRUE FOR THE OLDER WOMEN AS WELL) OUGHT TO USE THAT BLESSING TO SERVE GOD AND HIS PEOPLE - CERTAINLY NEVER TO SPEND THEIR TIME FOOLISHLY AND SERVING THEIR OWN DESIRES. PAUL NAMES "IDLENESS", "GOSSIP", "BUSYBODIES" AND OTHER THINGS "NOT PROPER TO MENTION" AS WHAT SUCH WOMEN WOULD BE WASTING THEIR TIME DOING INSTEAD (V. 13). HE'S NOT SAYING THIS IS WHAT YOUNG WOMEN DO IN GENERAL.

A YOUNG WOMAN MAY FEEL THE DESIRE TO MARRY, TO HAVE CHILDREN, AND TO HAVE PROPER SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS. PAUL AFFIRMS THAT YOUNG WOMEN WHOSE HUSBANDS HAVE DIED ARE FREE TO REMARRY AND IF THEY DO, THEY SHOULD MARRY GODLY MEN.

4 - IF A WIDOW IS CARED FOR, SHE SHOULD DEVOTE HER LIFE TO CARING FOR OTHERS, INCLUDING OTHER WIDOWS. (V. 16)

THIS FINAL VERSE INDICATES THAT IF A WIDOW IS CARED FOR BY HER FAMILY AND/OR BY THE CHURCH, THEY SHOULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS BLESSING TO BE A BLESSING, INCLUDING IN CASES WHERE OTHER WIDOWS ARE IN NEED. PAUL IS USING THIS SITUATION TO GIVE A FINAL REMINDER THAT THE CHURCH "MUST NOT BE BURDENED" UNNECESSARILY (V. 16).

I THINK IT IS INTERESTING FOR US TO HAVE THIS DISCUSSION AND HAVE SO MUCH OF SCRIPTURE DEVOTED TO THIS TOPIC. THE BIBLE IS NOT ONLY THE SOURCE OF STORY, THEOLOGY AND DOCTRINE, IS IT A SOURCE FOR INCREDIBLY PRACTICAL DIRECTION FOR GOD'S PEOPLE TODAY. THIS SECTION GIVES US SOME SPECIFICS REGARDING FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CHURCH AND REGARDING THE CARE FOR WIDOWS BUT IT IS ALSO ILLUSTRATING GOD'S HEART FOR HIS PEOPLE.

I THINK THERE ARE SOME WIDER IMPLICATIONS TO WHAT PAUL EXPLAINS IN THIS SECTION WHICH ARE WORTH OUR PRAYERFUL CONSIDERATION. A BIG PART OF THE PEOPLE GOD LISTS IN SCRIPTURE WHO HE CARES DEEPLY ABOUT ARE THOSE WHO ARE VULNERABLE - FINANCIALLY, PHYSICALLY, EMOTIONALLY ETC. THERE ARE MANY VERSES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT WHERE GOD *COMMANDS* HIS PEOPLE CARE FOR THE WIDOW, ORPHAN/FATHERLESS, STRANGER AND FOREIGNER. SUCH DIRECTIVES FORM THE BIBLICAL VALUES THAT SHOULD SHAPE THE CHURCH'S CULTURE.

WHEN I SAY "WIDER IMPLICATIONS", I MEAN THAT WE SHOULD ASK "WHO ARE THE VULNERABLE" IN OUR CHURCH COMMUNITY AND WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE FOR US TO HELP AND CARE FOR THEM? WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO HELP SOMEONE - WRITE A CHECK? GIVE THEM A PLACE TO LIVE? HELP THEM MANAGE THEIR FINANCES? HELP THEM GET A JOB? FILL UP THEIR GAS TANK? PAY OFF THEIR DEBT? BUY THEM GROCERIES? HELP THEM SIGN UP FOR HEALTH INSURANCE?

PAUL ADDRESSES THE NEED TO CARE FOR WIDOWS - WHAT ABOUT WIDOWERS, SINGLE MOMS AND DADS, DIVORCEES, CHILDREN WITHOUT PARENTS, CHILDREN WITHOUT CHRISTIAN PARENTS, (SINGLE PEOPLE IN GENERAL) COLLEGE STUDENTS, THE POOR, THE SICK, THOSE WITH DEBT, THOSE WHO HAVE MADE BAD LIFE DECISIONS?

GOOD QUESTIONS. GOOD QUESTIONS WORTH COMING TOGETHER AS A CHURCH FAMILY (NOT JUST ELDERS AND DEACONS) - TO PRAY AND DISCUSS AND TAKE ACTION IN LIGHT OF. WE CERTAINLY WANT TO LOVE THE WORLD AND OUR NEIGHBORS AND NEIGHBORHOODS, BUT LET'S NOT FORGET THE FOUNDATIONAL COMMAND OF THE WAY OF KING JESUS:

JOHN 13:34-35 - "A NEW COMMANDMENT I GIVE TO YOU, THAT YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER, EVEN AS I HAVE LOVED YOU, THAT YOU ALSO LOVE ONE ANOTHER. 35 "BY THIS ALL MEN WILL KNOW THAT YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES, IF YOU HAVE LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER."

BILL AND GLORIA GAITHER SAID IT LIKE THIS:

*YOU WILL NOTICE WE SAY "BROTHER AND SISTER" 'ROUND HERE,
IT'S BECAUSE WE'RE A FAMILY AND THESE ARE SO NEAR;
WHEN ONE HAS A HEARTACHE, WE ALL SHARE THE TEARS,
AND REJOICE IN EACH VICTORY IN THIS FAMILY SO DEAR.*

*I'M SO GLAD I'M A PART OF THE FAMILY OF GOD,
I'VE BEEN WASHED IN THE FOUNTAIN, CLEANSED BY HIS BLOOD!
JOINT HEIRS WITH JESUS AS WE TRAVEL THIS SOD,
FOR I'M PART OF THE FAMILY,
THE FAMILY OF GOD.*

MAY WE BE KNOWN AS CHRIST'S LOVE-FILLED AND LOVE-GIVING DISCIPLES TODAY. THIS IS WHAT IT MEANS TO BE THE FAMILY OF GOD.