

**Proposition: When it comes to church ministry, we need to take a family approach according to 1 Timothy 5:1-3, a text which gives us two guidelines.**

- I. Take a family approach to confrontation (1-2).
  - A. There is an unacceptable way to handle problems.
    1. The "It's none of my business" approach is wrong.
    2. The "In your face" approach is wrong.
  - B. There is an acceptable way to handle problems.
    1. Treat older men as fathers.
    2. Treat younger men as brothers.
    3. Treat older women as mothers.
    4. Treat younger women as sisters.
- II. Take a family approach to care-giving (3).
  - A. The church is to care for widows.
    1. This involves affixing value to them.
    2. This involves making sure their needs are met.
  - B. The church's care is based on need, not sentiment.
    1. Find out who is in need.
    2. Find out what the need is.
    3. Find out the best way to meet the need.

Implications: Why should we function like a family?

1. It brings glory to God.
2. It brings good to God's people.

Have you ever heard the saying, "The family that prays together stays together."? There's a lot of truth to that. A pastor-friend of mine modified that saying as follows, "The family that *plays* together *is* together."

Let's set the record straight. There is no such thing as a problem free family. That's why we need to *pray* together--because we need God. And why we need to *play* together--because God designed us to need each other.

No, good families, even godly families, are not problem free. Just how do you identify a godly family anyway? It's not the absence of problems. Look for a family that deals with its problems God's way.

Keep that thought in mind as we come to our study of the Word of God today. What's true of your family is also true of the church. Why? Because the church is a *family*. We are the *family of God*.

Paul explained in Ephesians 3:14-15, "For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom the whole *family* in heaven and on earth derives its name." We are a family.

Have you noticed the family terminology the NT writers used to depict the church? Paul used it in Romans 12:10, "Be devoted to one another in *brotherly love*." So did Peter in 1 Peter 1:22, "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your *brothers*, love one another deeply from the heart." The writer to the Hebrews used the family picture in 13:1, "Keep on loving each other as *brothers*." So did John in 1 John 3:16, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our *brothers*."

Just like there is no problem free family, neither is there such a thing as a problem free church family. Answer this. Why doesn't God just take us to heaven the moment He saves us? For instance, do you remember the day the Spirit of God convicted you of your need for Christ, and you repented of your sin and trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord?

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\*\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

What happened at that very moment? God gave you the gift of eternal life, right? Why, then, didn't the Lord just take you to heaven immediately? Why are you still here?

He has a purpose, doesn't He? He wants to do something *in* your life--to make you more like His Son, Jesus--and *through* your life--to spread the news of Christ to others.

So enter stage left--*problems*. Rather than taking us immediately to heaven, God allows us to face problems--so we'll *grow* and so we'll *show*. And what's true for us individually is true for us collectively as a church.

Church members lose jobs, get cancer, have rebellious teenage sons and daughters, and experience marriage spats, too, just like those outside the church. Churches lose their buildings to tornadoes. Churches have members who struggle with sinful habits, too.

And all around us lost people are watching, waiting to see if we respond to our problems any differently than they do.

What does God want them to see? A difference. How is a church family supposed to deal with its problems? According to 1 Timothy 5:1-3, by taking a *family approach* to problems.

"Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity. Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need."

In dealing with church problems, a *family approach* is in order. What does that mean? God gives us two guidelines for dealing with problems in verses 1-3.

#### I. Guideline #1: Take a family approach to confrontation (1-2).

That's what was needed in the church at Ephesus, the one in which Timothy ministered. It wasn't a "bad" church by any means. It had a lot going for it. But it had some problems.<sup>1</sup> Based on comments throughout 1 Timothy, we can deduce some of the problem-issues Timothy was facing in Ephesus:

<u>Reference:</u>	<u>Issue:</u>
1:3-7	Christian Education problems
2:1-8	Not many were showing up for prayer meeting, especially men
2:9-10	Some were turning church into a fashion show
2:11-12	Some men and women were switching their God-given roles
3:1-13	Some unqualified men on the pastoral staff and deacon board
4:1-5	False teachers promoting unbiblical ideas about family and diet
4:13; 2:1	The worship services were lacking
5:3-16	Some family neglect (some elderly weren't receiving proper care)
5:13	A gossip ring
5:17-18	Some church members didn't trust their leaders
5:19-21	Some were spreading accusations against pastoral staff members
6:1-2	There was employee/management turmoil
6:9-10	Materialism

A problem free church? Hardly. What do you do if you are a part of a not-so-perfect church? Paul's counsel to Timothy goes for us, too--Take a *family approach*. The truth is, there are two ways to approach problems.

**A. There is an unacceptable way to handle problems.** What's that? Paul told Timothy, "Do not rebuke an older man harshly." The verb is a strong one. It refers to

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<sup>1</sup>I am indebted to a message preached by John Greening on 10/28/96 for this insight.

harsh or violent rebuke. Literally it means "to strike at." This is the only place in the NT you'll find this term, although a related word appears in 3:3 where it indicates a church leader must not be "violent."

What's Paul saying here? Do churches have problems? Yes. Timothy faced them, and so do we. How are we supposed to deal with the problems? First, by recognizing there is an unacceptable way. It's the worldly approach, and it's the opposite of a family approach. The worldly approach shows up in two ways, both of which are unacceptable.

1. *The "It's none of my business" approach is wrong.* Notice Paul tells Timothy both what *not* to do and what to do. Don't rebuke an older man--that's what not to do. But do exhort him--that's the positive alternative.

Some Christians take the head-in-the-sand approach to church problems. As long as I'm okay with God, it's none of my business what's going on in your life." Not so. It is our business. It's our family, and what happens in our family is a reflection on our Father and His Son, Jesus (see Gal. 6:1). On the other extreme...

2. *The "In your face" approach is wrong.* In his pastoral work, Timothy faced some real problems. What was he to do? Ignore them. No. But neither was he to be abrasive. He was to attack the problem, not the person. He wasn't to slap people around physically or verbally. He wasn't to hammer them with harsh words. That's an unacceptable way to handle problems. God has a better way.

**B. There is an acceptable way to handle problems.** It's the *family approach*, and it involves caring confrontation.

Remember the context. The text we're studying was written by an apostle to his associate who had a position of authority in a local church. He wasn't a pastor, per se, but as an apostolic associate he possessed pastoral authority. He wasn't to abuse his authority, but he was to *use* it. God held him responsible to make sure the church confronted its problems.

That's true of any shepherd, by the way. A shepherd is to feed, lead, and weed. He is to model problem-solving. He is not the only problem solver--indeed Matthew 18 applies to all of us--but by example he's to show the congregation how to take a family approach to problems.

In verses 1-2, Paul targets four groups in the church, and explains for Timothy the acceptable way to handle problems with each.

1. *Treat older men as fathers.* "Rebuke not an elder, but exhort him as a father." The first group is that of the *presbuteros*. The term can refer to the office of an elder as in 5:17, 19, but here it's used more generally.

Do older men ever sin? That's a rhetorical question, isn't it? We'll struggle with sin until we see Jesus. John wrote (1 John 3:2-3), "What we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him like he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure."

Yes, even older men will struggle with sin, and sometimes fall prey to sin. What needs to happen then? He is to be approached with great respect, as if he were your father. But nonetheless he is to be approached.

Notice the balance here. Paul doesn't want Timothy to spare anyone and allow them to "get away with" their sins. Even older men--and remember Timothy was a young man in his mid-thirties. An older man isn't exempt from the authority of God's Word. But he's not to be "rebuked harshly," but "exhorted" as if he were your father.

The word "exhort" (*parakaleo*) can be translated as "to appeal, to encourage, to admonish," or even "to strengthen." The NT uses a related term to refer to the Holy Spirit,

*parakletos*. He's "the One called alongside to help." That's what Timothy was to do if he faced a problem that involved an older man--approach him as he would his own father.

At this point, we have a problem. Yes, we're to take a family approach to problem solving in the church. We're to approach each other as we would our own family members. But what if we have lousy relationships with our family members? What if you're a person that grew up thinking it was okay to "tell off your old man"? Now you've become a Christian--that's great--but are you to treat your church family the same way you treated your biological family members?

No, the text isn't saying, "Do as you *did*," rather, "Do as you *should have done*." A few years ago, I heard family counselor Gary Chapman begin a message by saying this, "It seems like all we hear these days are messages about the *dysfunctional* family. I'd like to teach you about the *functional* family."

How is it supposed to be in the family? For starters, the Bible makes it clear that older men are to be respected. Deuteronomy 5:16 commands, "Honor your father and mother." Leviticus 19:32 exhorts, "Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD." Proverbs 16:31 says that a "gray head is a crown of glory."

So how should you approach an older man? With great respect and honor, as God would have you approach your father. And as with your father, you mustn't yell at or talk condescendingly to him. You must respect his position. That doesn't mean he's always right, nor that you will always agree with him--remember, he's a sinner, too. And that doesn't mean an older man is beyond the need for admonishment. But if he needs it--and remember the shoe may be on your foot the next time--treat him as a father.

2. *Treat younger men as brothers.* In the Greek text, there is no verb here. The literal reading is simply, "Younger men as brothers."

What was true of your relationship with your biological brothers? I can just hear the remark, "We fought like cats and dogs!" Again the issue is how God *designed it to be*, not necessarily how it was!

Your brother is someone you share a bond with. You came from the same womb. To approach a younger man as you would a brother is to view him with no air of superiority (MacArthur, 188). There's no hierarchy.

They say, "Blood is thicker than water." Brothers stick together, they're devoted to one another--and so should we be as brothers in Christ (Rom. 12:10). Joseph is a great example of this. Though his brothers hated him and sold him as a slave, he reached out to them in love and met their needs (Gen. 45:4ff.; 50:15ff.).

So what should happen in the church if we see a younger man dishonoring Christ with his life? Does love say, "Judge not lest you be not judged?" Is that what you'd say--or should say--if it was your brother? The truth is, he *is* your brother.

And since that's the case, here's what Matthew 18:15 says we're to do, "If your brother sins against you [and some manuscripts don't have the words "against you"], go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over." If he doesn't, out of love for him, take one or two others along (16). If he refuses to listen to them, love goes further and involves the church in the restoration process (17). And if the brother refuses to heed the church's plea to repent, he is to be removed from its membership (17). But throughout the painful process he's to be treated as a brother.

Paul echoed the same idea in 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15, "If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him *as a brother*."

3. *Treat older women as mothers.* That's what verse 2 says. How is a mother to be treated? With affection, courtesy, and deep respect. Your mother is the one who gave you life. It's unacceptable before God to be disrespectful towards or to belittle one's mother. I'm amazed that one of Jesus' seven sayings from the Cross had to do with the care of His mother--even in His pain, He demonstrated respect and concern for her.

So how are we to deal with problems in the church if those problems involve older women? Again, there is no verb in verse 2. The NIV links the phrase to the verb "treat" in verse 1. But even the word "treat" has been inserted to make a smoother reading. The only verbs in the text are from verse 1: "rebuke" (what we're not to do) and "exhort" (what we are to do). The NIV's rendering makes it appear that these verbs go only with our treatment of the older men, but I think they relate to all four groups.

As with older men, a minister is not to rebuke an older woman, but if needed he is to exhort her. And he's to do it as gently as he would with his own mother (for a great example see Paul's advice on how to deal with two women who were causing problems in the Philippian church; Phil. 4:1-3).

4. *Treat younger women as sisters.* If a church problem involves a young woman, she is to be approached as if she were your sister. But Paul adds one additional qualifier. In fact, the ignoring of this qualifier has been the chief cause of ministerial mockery in our day. Younger women are to be approached as sisters *with absolute purity*.

It's the only group with a qualifier attached. For obvious reasons. As a man, Timothy was vulnerable, and if he ever forgot that he was in great danger. In a typical church over half of the congregation is of the opposite sex. That's obvious. What also should be obvious is an observation by John MacArthur (190), "Nothing so easily makes or breaks a young pastor as his conduct with women."

So what's a pastor to do? Ignore fifty percent of his congregation? No. For starters, he's to take heed to Titus 2. Remember what Paul told Titus there? In his ministry, Titus was to have a direct teaching ministry with four groups: older men (2), older women (3), young men (6), and slaves (9). But he was to have an indirect teaching ministry with one group: the younger women (4). How was it to work? Titus was to teach the older women so they in turn could teach the younger.

That's the first safeguard. When it comes to ministry with women, a wise shepherd will delegate. But aren't there times when he himself will minister to younger women? Yes, and when he does 1 Timothy 5:2 explains how he's to do it, "Treat younger women as sisters, with absolute purity."

You may be thinking, "This is so basic." And it is. But many churches are in great trouble today because they've neglected the basics. Let's resolve to be a biblical church. In dealing with problems, let's resolve to take a family approach to confrontation. We must not ignore problems. We must choose to address them--as a *family*.

There's a second guideline. Not all church problems are sin problems. Some are *direction* problems--we face challenges, and to resolve them we need direction. Timothy faced both kinds of problems--sin problems (1-2) and a direction problem (detailed in verses 3-16). The direction problem had to do with questions about a benevolent ministry in the church, specifically giving care to widows. How should we respond to this kind of challenge? The same way--by taking a family approach. Here's guideline #2...

## II. Guideline #2: Take a family approach to care-giving (3).

We'll just introduce the subject of care-giving today and develop it in the next couple of weeks. Notice verse 3, "Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need."

Does it strike you that Paul would devote so much ink to the subject of caring for widows? It did me at first, but the more I've pondered this text the more I've seen its relevance. Giving proper care to widows was and is a big issue for the church.

Do you realize how many widows we have in our church family? We have more widows than teenagers. Approximately one out of eight people in our church family is a widow. We have *twenty-three* women in our church who have lost their mates to death. Yes, the message of 1 Timothy 5 is quite relevant for us.

But that's not the only reason. The English word "widow" refers to a woman whose husband is dead. The Greek word *chera* includes that meaning but is not limited to it (MacArthur, 196). It simply means "bereft," "robbed," "having suffered loss," or "left alone." The word itself doesn't tell how the woman was left alone, but merely the fact that she is alone. It includes those who have lost their husbands through death, dissolution, divorce, or imprisonment (MacArthur), or could even cover cases where a polygamist came to Christ and sent away his extra wives (Barclay).

Listen to this comment by commentator and pastor, John MacArthur (196): "The responsibility of the church thus extends to all qualifying women who have lost their husbands. With divorce and dissolution rampant in our society, we face an even greater challenge than the Ephesian church."

What are we to do? From verse 3 alone, we discover two lessons about care-giving.

**A. The church is to care for widows.** "Honor widows that are widows indeed." What does it mean to *honor* widows? The word indicates two responsibilities

1. *This involves affixing value to them.* The KJV uses the verb "honor." A cognate would be *honorarium*. J. Vernon McGee explains (70), "It has in it the thought of value being attached to something. Sometimes when I speak on a Sunday or for a week of special services I receive a check that says on it, 'Honorarium.' In other words, they have attached value to what I have done."

Listen carefully. The world values production. "What can you do for me?" is the standard. You're valuable only if you can produce. That's why an unborn child can be murdered in the womb. The mother has a "right" to choose, so goes the rhetoric. And the unborn child's "right" to live is related to its productivity: Is it wanted? Is it healthy? Would it add to or take away from the parents' quality of life?

Yes, in the world a person is valuable only if he or she can produce. But not so in the church. Why not? Because our assessment of value is based on God's assessment, right? The reason we give honor to widows is because God affixes value to them.

The Bible has much to say about widows. Exodus 22:22 says, "Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan." Psalm 146:9 indicates, "The LORD watches over the alien, and sustains the fatherless and the widow." Isaiah 1:17 includes a command to "defend the cause of the widow."

Why? Because she can pay you back? No. It's because of what God says. We don't live tit-for-tat. Jesus didn't die on the Cross for us because we are *worthy*. The fact that He died for us is what gives us *worth*. And when we give honor to those the world says are not "productive," we're giving the world a picture of God, a picture of grace.

Giving honor to widows involves a second responsibility according to verse 3...

2. *This involves making sure their needs are met.* We'll develop that more fully next time, but a casual reading of the following verses indicates that care-giving involves more than pat on the back. The Ephesian church had a list (9) of widows who received practical care for their needs. Which brings us to lesson #2 about caregiving...

**B. The church's care is based on need, not sentiment.** Notice the verse again, "Give proper recognition to those widows who are *really in need*." That implies that some

widows don't qualify. Which ones do? Verses 4-16 tell us. As we'll see care-giving is to be based on need, not sentiment. Here are three principles.

1. *Find out who is in need.* Experienced pastor and author, Warren Wiersbe, remarks (229), "Whether we like to admit it or not, there are individuals and entire families that 'milk' local churches, while they themselves refuse to work or to use their own resources wisely." So we need to find out who is in need.

Not every widow qualifies, but the women who are "widows indeed" (as the KJV and NASB put it). Not every woman who has lost a husband is a *widow indeed*. As Paul will explain in the next section, a widow indeed is one who meets two qualifications. One, she has no relatives who can be expected to meet her needs (4-8). And two, she meets certain spiritual qualifications (given in verses 5-9).<sup>2</sup> So principle #1--find out who is in need.

2. *Find out what the need is.* Remember, in Paul's day there was no Social Security, no rest homes, no assisted living facilities. To complicate matters more, it was a man's world. There was very little opportunity for a woman to work--let alone get a good job. It was practically impossible for a young single woman to support herself, much less an older woman.

So the church developed a benevolent ministry to care for its widows (see Acts 6:1). They followed the principles given in 1 Timothy 5. One, find out who is truly in need. Two, find out what the need is. And three...

3. *Find out the best way to meet the need.* If she had relatives who could provide care, fine (4). If she could care provide care for her own needs (as in the case of younger widows, 11), fine. But if she was destitute, the church intervened. The point is, God wants His people to use wisdom in determining the best way to meet the need.

Listen carefully. As Christians we are commanded to care for others, just as our Savior did. We're to be tenderhearted, generous, and willing to take risks with people. The Lord did with us, didn't He?

Ponder 2 Corinthians 8:9, "But you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though He was rich yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you, through your poverty, might be made rich." He didn't treat us as we deserved. And we must never fall into the mindset of treating other people like we think they *deserve* to be treated. We who have received grace must extend grace, too.

But the demonstration of grace must be based on need, not sentiment. J. Vernon McGee's insight is noteworthy (70-1), "The early church took care of widows, but they didn't do it in some haphazard, sentimental way. The deacons were to make an investigation to see who were truly widows, where the need was, and how much need there was."<sup>3</sup>

The family that prays together may stay together. And the family that plays together *is* together. But the church family that has God's blessing is the one that works on its problems together. It truly functions like a family, in confrontation and in care-giving.

Implications: Why should we function like a family? For two reasons...

1. *It brings glory to God.* When we take a family approach to ministry, we let the world see Christ. "By this will all men know that you are my disciples," Jesus said, "if you have love one for another." And secondly...

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<sup>2</sup>J. N. D. Kelly, p. 113.

<sup>3</sup>William Barclay offers this perspective (108), "If a person is to be supported, that person must be supportable. If a parent is taken into a home and then by inconsiderate conduct causes nothing but trouble, another situation arises. There is a double duty here; the duty of the child to support the parent and the duty of the parent to be such that that support is possible within the structure of the home."

2. *It brings good to God's people.* We'll learn more how next time.