



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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### The Sermons of Dan Duncan

1 Timothy 5: 1-6

“Care for Others”

1 Timothy

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Let’s begin with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank You for the time we have to come together this evening. We thank You for the many blessings that we have in Your son and our savior. And we thank You that You have equipped us well to live a life that’s pleasing to You. You have given us your word, and You have given us the Holy Spirit to interpret it. And so we pray this evening that as we do so, as we study, that You would bless us in that way, that the spirit of God would guide us in our thinking and may He make the proper applications to us that may not be made in the lesson itself. You, Father, know our condition far better than we do. And You can take the word and even a text that seems rather distant to our particular needs, and You can take the principles of it and apply it to us in ways that – far more effective than a teacher can do.

And so we look to You to bless us and teach us, minister to us, open our hearts to receive Your truth. Prepare us for study this evening. And we pray for the other classes that meet. We pray that You bless Your word when it’s taught and bless those who meet together. Bless the young people. Bless their fellowship together, and bless ours together this evening. We look to You to bless us. We thank You for Christ, for His death for us, and for all that we have in Him. And it’s in His name we pray. Amen.

[Message] 1 Timothy 5, beginning with verse 1, “Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men

as brothers, the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity.

Honor widows who are widows indeed; but if any widow has children or grandchildren, they must first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God. Now, she who is a widow indeed and who has been left alone, has fixed her hope on God and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day. But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives. Prescribe these things as well, so that they may be above reproach. But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, having been the wife of one man, having a reputation for good works; and if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, and if she has devoted herself to every good work. But refuse to put younger widows on the list, for when they feel sensual desires in disregard of Christ, they want to get married, thus incurring condemnation, because they have set aside their previous pledge. At the same time, they also learn to be idle, and they go around from house to house and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention. Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach; for some have already turned aside to follow Satan. If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, she must assist them and the church must not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed.”

Christianity is about doctrine. It makes great demands on the mind. And Paul has instructed Timothy to teach sound doctrine and to counter the false doctrine that had entered into the church at Ephesus. But Christianity is not all about doctrine. There's also practice. In fact, if our practice does not conform to our beliefs, then we defeat our own witness, and we may indicate by our conduct that we never really embraced the truth. And one of the

principle responsibilities that we have is caring for others, caring for those in the church. And that is what Paul now takes up in 1 Timothy 5. In Galatians 6:2, he wrote, “Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfil the law of Christ.” It is important that we look out for each other and give help when and where it is needed.

But there’s a right way to do that. And in chapter 5, Paul gives instruction on how that is to be done in some situations with some groups in the church. Really, two groups are mentioned – people in need of correction or rebuke or guidance and widows who are in need of material help. So in verses 1 and 2, he gives instruction on how to correct both the older and the younger members of the congregation. This is never an easy thing to do, to give correction. It’s not pleasant to receive correction, to be told that we’re wrong, to be told where we’re wrong and how we need to correct our ways. And it’s not a particularly pleasant experience to give correction.

But it is necessary to do it – very important to do it. And with older people, it is to be done carefully. Paul writes that they are not to be sharply rebuked. Now, that is a strong word that Paul uses. And, literally, it means something like strike upon, as hitting with a blow. So the idea is to hit with words. It’s not to be done. Words can smart more than a slap of a hand. And so Timothy is to be very careful. Everyone needs correction. Young and old alike, we all need correction. But when correction is given to an older person, it’s not to be given in anger. It’s not to be given with harshness. It’s not to be given in a way that shows any form of disrespect.

The Bible puts a lot of stress upon showing respect for age. And while Timothy may have been close to 40 years old – he was not a particularly young person – he was relatively young compared to some of the others in the congregation. And so when dealing with them, he was to treat the older people with high regard rather than correcting the elders. And that literally is the word that’s used here – presbyter. Obviously, here, it does not refer to the officers of the church, and because it also refers to the women in the church, and it used in contrast to the young people in the church. So he’s speaking here of older people in the church. Rather than correcting them with

a sharp rebuke, Timothy is to do it with an appeal. That word appeal has the idea of an exhortation. And it suggests encouragement. It suggests kindness.

And so rather than be hard on a person, he should be encouraging in his correction. That’s a good word for all of us. When we have to give a word of correction, regardless of who we are correcting, we should do it in a way if it would bring encouragement. It’s not to repel a person. It’s not to drive them away. It’s to help them. It’s to help them change course and to be built up in the faith. And so that’s a good word regardless of the age – to be an encouragement, to do so in a way that would suggest or indicate kindness. Now, that is true particularly, though, in this statement for those who are of the older generation. And so Timothy is counseled to speak to an older man as a father and to an older woman as a mother – in other words, to be courteous, to be kind, to be tactful in the way he gives out correction.

And that’s really true in correcting young people as well. “The younger men as brothers,” Paul says, “the younger women as sisters.” In other words, don’t speak down to the younger people. Be courteous. Be very thoughtful of the older people, and be thoughtful of the younger people. And treat them – someone put it – as part of the fraternity – your peers, your friends, one that you’re joined together with – and speak to them in that way, as to a brother, as to a sister.

Now, with younger women, Paul adds something that isn’t added by way of qualification to the others. He says that when dealing with younger women, he is to do it in all purity. In other words, Timothy is to be very careful in the way he deals with younger women. As one of the commentators put it, “He should behave as he want other men to act toward his own sister.” And so treat younger women in that way – in a very kind way, but in a very cautious way. And that particular commentator went on to write, “For at this very point, many young men on the threshold of long and fruitful service have lost their usefulness.” And that’s happened – not just younger men, but older men. And as you get older in the ministry, you see more and more casualties along the way among men who were very gifted and had opportunity to be very fruitful. So men in the ministry cannot be too cautious.

And let's not limit that to men who've gone to seminary and who preach on Sunday morning. It's true of anyone who engages in bearing other's burdens and helping other people. All of us may be called upon to give counsel at one time or another. Elders are called upon to do that frequently. Not all of our elders went to seminary. Most didn't. They need to be prepared for this as well. Be cautious in one's relationships, and a specific caution is given here when Timothy is to deal with younger women.

Well, the next group that Paul addresses is widows. And he gives a lot of attention to this subject from verses 3 through 16, which suggests that this was an issue of great concern in the apostolic church. We see that in Acts 1:1. The first crisis in the church had to do with the care of widows in the church in Jerusalem. And evidently, it was a problem in the church at Ephesus as well. And so Paul takes up their situation, their need. In verse 3, he tells Timothy to honor widows. That probably means more than show respect for widows. I would think it means that, but it would mean more than. It has the idea of providing them with material support. And the context would support that conclusion. For example, in verse 17, we read, “The elders who rule well are considered worthy of double honor.” And what he's speaking of there is financial blessing or help.

So that is the gist of this instruction that he's giving. That's the main point, the theme that he's developing here in regard to caring for widows. He qualifies the instruction as being for widows indeed. So this is not just for any widow – this instruction that he gives – but for those who meet certain qualifications, certain standards, and who are without any means of support. These women were to be put on a list. They were to be enrolled in an order of widows, who would receive financial aid, would be helped materially, and it appears – this isn't brought out in the text, but it seems to be the case by implication – would also have certain responsibilities in the church to do certain things, to be of help in certain ways.

But there were qualifications. And in the next verses, Paul gives them. They are strict. The church has limited resources. Many churches today don't seem to have limited resources. They seem to be very wealthy, and

many of them are. But in the first century, churches had very limited resources. They were not made up of wealthy people for the most part. There were many slaves in the churches – had very limited means. And so a church had to use its finances wisely. It does today as well – particularly important because of the limited means that they had. And it was to be spent on the needy and those who had proved themselves as deserving of it.

In verse 4, Paul gives some limitations. Those with relatives – widows with relatives, with children or grandchildren, are to be cared for by them – by their family. This is a responsibility that rests with the family, not with the congregation. Whenever the immediate family can take care of relatives, that’s the family’s responsibility. Paul speaks of that as practicing piety by the children. There’s some question in the text as to who it is that’s practicing piety, the widow or the children and grandchildren. But the grammar would seem to support that the practice of piety is by the children. And the practice of piety is caring for their parents. That’s a spiritual act. It’s a responsibility before God. And so he speaks of it as practicing piety. And it’s a responsibility to the parents. It’s only right, as Paul says, to make some return to their parents. It honors them as honoring parents, and also, it is repayment for the care that was given to us in bringing us up. And so that is a responsibility of the members of the family. This, as Paul explains, is acceptable in the sight of God. It’s acceptable to Him and an act of piety on our part, because it fulfills the fifth commandment of honoring one’s father and mother. So it is the responsibility of the family to take care of widows when they have the means to do so.

Now, in verses 5 through 8, Paul explains what a widow indeed is. And in verse 5, he gives some qualifications. They have to do with her condition and with her character. First, her condition is she’s desolate. To qualify as a widow indeed, she must be one who has been left alone. That is, she has no family to care for her, and so she has no means of support. Secondly, her character is one of a spiritual woman. She’s, first of all, fixed her hope on God. So she is a Christian widow, as distinguished from a non-Christian widow. She’s fixed her hope on God. And secondly, she

demonstrates her reliance on God by her continual piety, by offering entreaties and prayers day and night. So she continues in them. Literally, she abides in prayers day and night. So she is what we would call a prayer warrior. She's diligent in that ministry, and that's a very significant ministry. She continues in it. She's continually praying.

We all need to be doing that. We need to pray without ceasing. That's what we're told to do. So we need to be men and women of prayer. But the fact is, there are some people who are more devoted to doing that than others. And they are very good at it. They devote themselves to it. They, in effect, abide in it, live in it. They are men and women of ministry of prayer. And they have a very effective ministry in that way. The value of that ministry is probably greater than we know. We don't think of that as the kind of ministry that is great ministry. We think of a preacher as having great ministry or an evangelist doing great ministry, or maybe someone who's given large gifts and has helped in that way. But prayer is an extremely important ministry.

And I think that we will see how important it is at the judgment seat of Christ, what Paul talks about in 2 Corinthians 5 in verse 10, “When our deeds, both good and bad, will be made known,” we'll see how important and valuable that ministry of prayer was and is and how significant, people such as these widows were, who prayed day and night for the church and how they were, in large part, responsible for the effectiveness of the ministry of the elders and the deacons and the teachers and the effectiveness of the church as a whole. That will be seen. That will be true. And so these are women who are devoted to prayer.

Now, how do we know they're devoted to prayer? As I was studying this, I thought, “Well, how would we know that?” I mean, prayer's private. One prays in one's house. One can't see one praying day and night in one's house. In the Greek text, these words – the words for prayer have the definite article. So what this would literally read is, “In the entreaties and the prayer,” which probably refers to the meetings of the church. I wouldn't want to limit her prayer life to that at all, because this is night and day. But what it suggests is that she attends regularly the meetings of the church, and she's

there, and she's one who prays in those meetings. So these are widows who are faithful to the ministry of the church. They're there at the meetings. And they are known as women who are devoted to prayer.

They have as their example, the prophetess Anna, who is referred to in Luke 2 in verse 37. She was married for seven years. Her husband died, and then she was a widow for 84 years. And during that time, Luke writes, “She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers.” So you see the night and day with fastings and prayers is the pattern that Paul develops here. She was devoted to the work of God. So for 84 years, she lived within the temple serving the lord. And that's the model for the widow indeed, the one that would qualify for the assistance and ministry in the church. She's devoted to God's service.

But not all widows who are without families were widows indeed. And in verse 6, Paul writes of those who are without families, but who give no evidence of having fixed their hope on God, but instead are worldly-minded. They're self-indulgent. Paul describes such a person as giving herself to wanton pleasure. So her chief concern is herself. Her chief concern is her own comfort, her own pleasure. She's not thinking of others. And so Paul writes that she is, “Dead even while she lives.” That's quite a picture he gives there. She's physically alive. She's mentally alive. She's emotionally alive. She has all the signs of life. And, yet, she's spiritually dead, which describes a useless life that's been spent on the pursuit of personal pleasure. She's physically alive, but spiritually dead. These are not the women that are to be cared for by the church.

So because of the need in the church and in light of these facts, Paul tells Timothy to prescribe or command these things. That is, he's to give instruction to the relatives of widows to take care of these widows, and he's give the instruction here for the sake of the widows so that they will know what is expected of them, the requirements, the standards that they're to meet. And Paul emphasizes, again, the importance of the Christian's responsibility to provide for his or her immediate family in verse 8. Anyone who doesn't, he says, has denied the faith. Probably doesn't mean that he or she has

committed apostasy, but is living like one who has. In other words, **he maybe say**, but lacks the proof of it, at least in that regard. And further, he says, that such a person is, “Worse than an unbeliever,” worse than an infidel, because even pagans, evidently – this seems to be Paul’s meaning – even pagans in that day understood that they had an obligation, a responsibility to take care of their parents and family. You see this in non-Christian societies and the Orient, how devoted they are to the family and taking care of their parents, their aged parents. And so Paul is saying that pagans do this. A lack of that should not be present in the church. Evidently, that was the case. Evidently, in the church at Ephesus, some of the Christian families were being selfish and instead of taking care of their parents, they were looking after themselves. They were thinking only of themselves. So Paul’s tone becomes very sharp here in verse 8.

It’s a terrible thing when you think about it – very terrible thing when unbelievers, when pagans live a better life in some regards than Christians, when they set a higher standard than Christians. It happens. It shouldn’t happen, but it does. The church, though, should be the one that leads. The church should never be the one that follows behind the world. And, yet, so often, that’s exactly what we do. So often, we take our standard from the world around us rather than from the word of God. Rather than setting a standard that’s higher than the world, we tend to fit in with the world and pursue the same things they do and have the same ideals and standards. So Paul is giving a sharp rebuke here for what evidently was taking place in that church of Ephesus, where there was some selfishness and lack of responsibility.

Now, for those whom the church was to care for, Paul writes of a widows’ list in verses 9 and 10. And he gives the qualifications for being on it. They are qualifications of age, of marital status, and a good reputation at home and elsewhere. The age requirement is 60. A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than 60 years old. Now, why the age 60? Well, Paul doesn’t say, but probably because, as one of the commentators stated, the recognized in antiquity, when one became an old man or woman, was the

age of 60. And it was an age when it was unlikely that a woman in the first century would have remarried. So this is the age that Paul says, first of all, she must be 60. She has to meet an age requirement to be placed on this widows' list and be part of this order of widows within the church.

And then she is to have a particular marital status – having been the wife of one man. Now, this statement, the wife of one man, is the same construction of that expression that was used of the elder back in chapter 3 in verse 2, as being the husband of one wife. We dealt with it at some length there, so I won't go into the details of it again. But if you remember, it doesn't mean faithful as it is often times interpreted as meaning. It's doubtful, in terms of widows, that she would have remained married long enough to become a widow if she hadn't been faithful. It doesn't mean that she was the wife of only one man at a time. That's another way that that's been interpreted. A woman could be married more than once and be a widow, but she couldn't be the wife of one man. So it must mean that she is the wife of only one man. She was married only once.

Now, that's confirmed from the evidence outside the bible from pagan and Christian and Jewish inscriptions on tombs. I think I mentioned this back in chapter 3 when we studied the elder, but there, the inscriptions on tombs from a wide range of cultures made it very clear that this expression, the wife of one man, which was used on these inscriptions was used as a eulogy. And it was seen as a virtue. And so that would give support to this being a virtue in this woman. She was married only once.

And as I pointed out back in that previous lesson some weeks ago, this is not to say that it's wrong for a person to get remarried. It's not a sin. Paul doesn't say that. In fact, Paul will urge younger widows to get remarried. That's not the issue. The issue's not sin. It has to do, as I would understand it, with how the outside world perceives the church and those who occupy positions within the church, particularly with the elder, and that was the issue. Must be approve reproach and give no cause at all for the world around – the enemy – to bring accusations against the local church. And as we'll see in a moment, that is Paul's great concern and the issue here with widows,

both younger and older. So the issue here is not a matter of sin. It's not a sin to remarry. But the person who does remarry can't be an elder and can't be on the widow's list.

Preferably, she is to have a reputation for good works. Verse 10, “Having a reputation for good works, if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, if she has devoted herself to every good work.” Having washed the saints' feet may be literally true. It may be that she actually did that. Though, most think this probably means something else, because that was a task of a servant usually. But it's certainly possible that if a family didn't have servants, that the wife had washed the feet of the saints. But more than likely, it's an expression of humility. And we think of Christ doing that, bending down in John 13 and washing the feet of his disciples. It shows humility. It shows service. That's the kind of person she was. And what this list in verse 10 demonstrates is that she is a responsible person. The works are all of a practical nature. Doesn't say that she studies greatly and that she teaches – not that that's not practical. It certainly is. But of this kind of nature, where she is dealing with people, she's helping people, and this is the best evidence that she could carry out those kinds of duties within the church if she was placed upon the widows' list. This, again, suggests that these widows, who were placed on the list, had something to do. It wasn't simply that they received assistance, but they did some kind of service. And this would suggest that as the requirement or the things that Paul has to say about the younger widows. He goes on to mention them in the next verses.

Those who are less than 60 years of age are to be excluded from the list. We read in verse 11, “But refuse to put younger widows on the list, for when they feel sensual desires in disregard of Christ, they want to get married.” Verse 12, “Thus incurring condemnation, because they have set aside their previous pledge.” So, evidently, upon joining this order or being placed on the list, they made a pledge. And this would suggest, again, that there were duties for these women to perform, because what, evidently, took place – I'm drawing inferences from this – but what evidently was the case is

that they would make a pledge that they would remain unmarried and devote them self to the service of the church. But that could put a great strain on a young woman, who over time, might find that she wants to get remarried and have a family. And the desire could be so great that she would leave widowhood for marriage and, in so doing, break her vow, and in doing that, incur condemnation. So Paul, recognizing the difficult position that younger women are in, having made a vow, considers that it's much better that they marry and so go on to give counsel for them to do rather than put themselves in that position that would make it difficult for them to keep their vow, or, as he also indicates, because of sensual desire, bring scandal on the church.

Another reason for limiting the list to older widows is because the younger widows could become idle. Verse 13, “At the same time they also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention.” Now, this point here in verse 13 may fit with the same principle that Paul gave in chapter 3 in verse 6 about not putting a novice in a place of responsibility. And so younger women should not be placed in a position of responsibility either. But the reason that he gives here is that they become idle, and they become gossips, and they do things that they shouldn't be doing, wandering from house to house.

Now, I don't know that Paul is suggesting that women have a particular inclination toward gossip. We might think that from reading this, and I know that there are plenty of people that think that's probably the case. But I have to say, and I'm not saying this in deference to women, I'm saying this because it's been my experience, my experience has been men have as much of a problem as women do. In fact, the people that I have known that were the biggest gossips were men. And maybe that's because I spend more time with them in those kinds of situations than I do with women.

I think, really, that the problem – and I'm not letting you women off the hook. I don't know. Maybe I'm being too generous. But I think that it's really a problem of human nature. People like to talk. And the real problem here seems to be, to my mind at least, idleness. That young women who were

enrolled in the order of widows, who were placed on this list and would be provided for would have too much time on their hands. They've got lots of energy, too much time on their hands, and so they go from house to house, because they're idle, and they become busybodies.

So it's not good for people to be idle. That seems, to me, to be the problem. It's not good for anyone to be idle. We weren't made for that. When God made Adam and Eve, he placed in the garden with a task to perform, and they were to work. And that's what we're to do. We're to be about the task that God has given us. And when we're not, when we become idle, then we begin to drift into the things that we are not to be doing. So you men or you ladies who have responsibilities, and those jobs or responsibilities begin to weigh on you, and you feel like it's hard, it's hard work that you're doing. We all come to that point when we think it's hard. This is difficult. But you can rejoice in that because it's better to be doing that than to be idle. Idleness is fine for a while, but then it leads to all kinds of problems. So I think that's the main problem. These women don't need to be idle. Young women don't need to be in that situation.

So while the ideal might be to remain a widow, to remain unmarried, the reality is it's too difficult for most, for younger women. And the best alternative is marriage, which is what Paul prescribes in verse 14. “Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach.” Marriage is pious state, and it will give these young widows, these young women the opportunity to be very useful. And it will keep them from occasions that might lead to bringing shame upon the church and giving the non-believing community, non-Christian community reason to criticize. So by marrying, by having children, by keeping house, they will give the enemy no occasion for reproach.

As I said earlier, Paul's very concerned about this issue of the reputation of the church. He was very anxious for the congregation to stand well with the outside world. It was very important. It's our witness. And the church's reputation for Paul was very important, and it should be very important for us. In every area of the existence of this church and this

community, we should be above reproach. And so that is the reason for many of the rules that Paul gives here for elders, for deacons, for widows. As Paul explains in verse 15, some had already done that. They had, as he said, turned aside to follow Satan. It doesn't define that, but it probably means fallen into immorality.

With verse 16, Paul unexpectedly shifts back to the subject of care for the ineligible widows. And on this, we end our lesson. He writes, “If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, she must assist them and the church must not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed.” Now, that's a rather difficult statement. It's not altogether clear what Paul means, but what he seems to mean is that a Christian woman of means, that is, a woman who has financial ability to help and who has widows in her house – maybe they're widows who were servants or friends – she's to take care of them. She's to meet their financial needs. Now, the obligation is not placed on a man. He singles out a believing woman for the obvious reason that it would be unsuitable for a man to take young widows into his house. And if it was a man who was married, then most likely, the responsibilities of taking care of the widows would fall to the woman as well. So either way, it's a woman who's going to take care of these widowed women who were ineligible for that widows' list.

But in taking on this responsibility, she'd be doing a great service for the church, Paul says. She will take the burden off the church so that the church will be free to use its means to care for those who are widows indeed, those who need help. So it indicates that women, as we look at this, the women who are on the list, who are in prayer and petition, who are night and day doing that, and these other women that helped in this way of assistance did great deal of service for the church. It's not service as we might think of it in terms of standing at a lectern or in a pulpit preaching. But it's a great service that women do, and they were to be engaged in it. Well, we're all to be doing a service for the lord. And may He help us to do that and encourage us to do that and enable us to do it faithfully in all that we do.

Let's bow in the word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for the truth of this text, a text that seems very narrow in its scope, but addressing a very specific problem. And yet, we can bring principles out of it that do apply to all of us, how we address one another with correction and how we serve. A widow of this kind is really a model not just for other women but for men as well. We're to be devoted to prayer. We're to be devoted to the service of other people. We're to be humble, willing to wash the feet of the saints, serve them in humility. May we be that kind of people, Father. We can only be that by Your grace, and we pray that You would bless us with the grace that sanctifies and changes us and makes us more and more like Your son. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.