

11/5/23 - 1 Tim. 5:1-16 - "God's Household of Intentionality"

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[0:00] A reading from 1 Timothy, chapter 5, 1 through 16. Do not rebuke an older man, but encourage him as you would a father.

Younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity. Honor widows who are truly widows.

But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents.

For this is pleasing in the sight of God. She, who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day.

But she, who is self-indulgent, is dead even while she lives. Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach.

[1:06] But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than 60 years of age, having been the wife of one husband and having a reputation for good works.

If she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work.

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 former faith.

Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not.

[2:08] So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander. For some have already strayed after Satan.

If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows.

Word of the Lord. Amen. I think that this passage today is a little bit tricky. It talks about things that seem a little bit bizarre and removed from our needs and things that we do.

Not only are we given two quick verses regarding inherited parameters of respect for those of high in ages, our elderly folks, our elderly folks.

And that's not only the two verses, but also 14 verses go into this expanse regarding widows. And we have to ask, when we come to passages like this that are tricky, we have to ask what we do with the passage.

[3:25] We have to ask, why does it matter? Well, the ESV, I think, helps us, for once, helps to guide our train of thought in the title that it gives this section.

Do you see in your ESV Bible, it says, instructions for the church. These are the do's and the don'ts for the church.

And this helps us to draw closer to the passage meaning, meaning that it's an audience change. It's not just between Paul and Timothy anymore and where we glean from his instructions as a corporate church, but he's changing rhythm and changing direction to the church at large.

Instructions for the church. And so, was Paul simply just giving instructions? Was his intent of just saying, do this and don't do that?

Are those the types of instructions? Well, I wouldn't imagine that that would be much of a sermon for you today, of don't do this and do this. That would be legalism.

[4 : 39] And I think we have to scratch our head, even though we've discovered that it's instructions for the church, we have to scratch our heads and think about why.

Why are these instructions to the church? And what we will come to learn, I believe, about these instructions to the church, the gathering of the church, the pillar and the buttress of the truth, is that this is God's initiative and His means of showing mercy to the world, the gathered church.

Now, some may believe that the church is just a group of people who sometimes get along, get together once in a while, and do good for others in charity initiatives and advocacy.

And while this is certainly a simplified truth, it's missing a lot of the hearts of our gathering. It doesn't hit the heart of our gathering at all. The church isn't simply about socialization, though we socialize. It's not just about activism, but we are very active for social causes and moral causes in the world. But rather, the church is to operate with intentionality in what we do.

[5 : 58] Intentionality meaning purpose. Our actions, our works have to be purposeful, simply to say intentional or deliberate.

Without it, you have dogmatism. You have dogmatic, empty religion, a bunch of do's and don'ts.

And with it, with intentionality, you have a profound expression of mercy to testify to the world.

As we unpack this passage, that will be reinforced throughout, and I want us to see that today. And the sermon title today is God's Household of Intentionality.

God's Household of Intentionality. I have three sections that I've broken this up. I was tossing back and forth of two to three, but I think for the sake of thematic emphasis, I split it into three so that we can dive into this in a couple different chunks.

But I'd like to pray before we dive into the first section, asking the Lord to work in our hearts and our minds today by the power of the Holy Spirit. So please join me in prayer. Father, we thank You for this time where we can come around and assemble around Your Word.

[7 : 17] We thank You for a time that could have been an option in our schedule of things to do today. Father, we thank You for the extra hour of sleep, and I think the whole church says amen to that.

And we are so grateful that we got to rest an extra hour today. And we know that at times of rest, we lean and we trust You because You're always working.

And Father, we pray that as we are awake and attentive, that we enter into Your work, and specifically the work of Your Word in our hearts and our lives. Help us, Lord, to yield to Your Word today.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So the first section that I have for us today is intentionality within the family and church.

Just as the construct of a family is ordered with respect towards those older than, like, daughters and sons, they are to respect their mothers.

[8 : 24] It's written in the Ten Commandments. So to the church who has lost respect for elderly folks, elderly individuals has lost intentionality of the gospel.

This is what I want us to see when Paul makes this point to Timothy clear in verse 2, 1 and 2. He says, Respect in the family and the church runs completely counter to the respect in a worldly sense.

In the world, just like we talked about the path of worldliness and godliness last week, we're on one or the other. There's no in-between. Well, in the world, respect has to be earned.

You earn respect in the world. But in the church, it seems like respect is given. And this being a unique, intimate link with the Imago Dei, the image of God.

And so what does that respect look like? We see in verse 1, older men. He mentions older men to Timothy and the church. The respect of older men and women is vital.

[9 : 50] And for young Timothy, he would have to then practice restraint in his directing older men within the church in Ephesus. And now, being an older gentleman, we'll say a gentleman.

This isn't giving older folks an immunity agreement that they can just say and do what they want.

And Timothy cannot overlook sin. Paul has already established that in chapter 1, verse 3.

He's supposed to address and lean into some issues in that church. So, when rebuke or admonition is called for then, as it inevitably will be called for, we'll see that in chapter 6.

Timothy simply cannot be harsh. He cannot be harsh. And correction must be fueled tactfully and full of love. With older men, I think it's something that finds its expression in reminders to older men, not reprimands to older men.

That's something how I believe it organizes itself. Now, it's funny because I've had sort of this expression weaponized against me, as if to like manipulate me and like, you know what the Bible says, respect your elders.

[11:09] I had it from a stepmother one time. And, yeah, I know that's certainly true. The Bible doesn't actually say that, but it does express that.

And we get that expression here of respect that is inherent with age. It's part of the imago Dei, the image of God, and grows.

It seasons itself in respect as life goes on. And this is important because respect can be given even when saying hard truths to older men.

Timothy was called to quite a task in this church. And he could still do it respectfully to bring correction. Or even drawing hard lines in the sand.

You can do that with respect, regardless of age or regardless of status. And he goes into the verse about younger men.

[12:04] This is a little bit easier. This is the brotherhood kind of thing. Like, hey, quit being dumb, you know. If anybody has brothers, that's pretty much it. You know, and that reprimand looks a little bit different, but it would be disastrous for that type of tone to be used with older men.

But also women, older women, the same goes for older women as well, just as older men. Just as mothers should be shown love and shown care, because they've earned that through years of investment within their kids' lives.

They've earned that. And so too should the attitude be brought into the family of God. And then also younger women.

You know, it gets interesting with younger sisters. I've had older sisters, and there are a lot of fingernails, a lot of hitting and slapping and things like that. So I don't know the particulars of how that's supposed to pan out for the church in Ephesus, but I don't think it's fingernails.

But for younger women, it seems like he is calling this church to value younger women with the same value that they will one day inherit in their older age.

[13:17] And so protect them in all purity. And you see, even in just two verses, we see something developing, and it has to do with respect.

Respect is an intentional attribute that unites the church together. It proportionally grows corporately with age and individually with age.

And this is an attribute found within the church. It's an intentional attribute. And we should see something that Paul's developing here. As he's contrasting the home life and the respect within a home structure with the home life of a household of God, we see that the family is indeed a church family.

This is a church family. It's God's design to be a family, brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers.

We see that in John 1.12, to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, Christ's name, Christ gave the right to become children of God.

It's not what they earned. This is attributed by way of faith. It's a gift of God, lest anyone boast. Believe and enter into the family.

[14:46] Maybe some of you did that this morning in just our time of worshiping and singing the gospel songs. Believe and enter into that family. And there's something also in this passage as he's contrasting, because I believe that the church, according to this passage, is God's intended purpose to be his first family.

The church is God's first family. That family takes precedence over biological family. Yeah, blood is thicker than water, right?

You've heard the saying. But I believe the Spirit is superior to the blood of Jesus Christ. This is something that is unbreakable in the church.

Consider Jesus Christ's example in Mark 3.31. He says, And his mother and his brothers came, and standing around, they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, Your mother and brothers are outside seeking you.

And he answered them, Who are my mothers and my brothers? And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, Here are my mother and my brothers.

[16:00] Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother. There's something intimate and unique and superior about the church family in contrast with biological family.

Something deeper rooted. Something that's eternal in nature. And in this construct of intentionality of the family, that was brought with Christ's blood, we see this integration of familial respect, finding its greatest expression there, within the household of God, within the church family.

You don't believe me? Well, why does he say to younger women, with all purity, might get graphic. But consider the vile act of adultery in the family of God.

That ought to be viewed as vile as incest in a family. Completely wrong. You see, in a day where respect is lost, Aretha Franklin is crying, rolling over.

Right? Because this country just has no respect for anyone. Kids come home and complain about a teacher.

[17 : 30] The parents go to the teacher. Rather than say, Well, you're failing. Study. There's no respect in the constructs of society. And unfortunately, I believe this construct is also being lost in the church as well.

In the name of not being legalistic or old-fashioned and things of that nature. If you want to know the truth about it, I probably would have never chosen this passage in a topical series to preach. It just doesn't seem like it would force me to study and find a lot of great joy in talking about the family and widows. Not saying anything against widows.

But it's forcing us as a church through exposition to wrestle with the passages that are often neglected. What would the church look like if they actually wrestled with this passage?

And saw God's design of respect not being something old-fashioned, but very formative in the life of the church today.

[18 : 35] Amen? In a day and age where respect is lost in the schools, in the homes, and in the church, God intended the church to be intentional in that department.

We also see in the second section, intentionality toward the outcasts. And Paul continues this emphasis of respect, but turns great attention toward cultural outcasts of Paul's day.

Widows. Widowed women. You see, the level of God's love for widowed women ought to shake our church metrics to the core.

Some may look at the scoreboards of baptisms that they've had in a year. Some may look at attendance records and the record-breaking Easter attendance or Christmas attendance and all that, but I think few would look deliberately at their care for widows.

God has been known as the protector of widows. This goes back and is named and attributed to God's name in Psalm 68.

[20 : 08] He even had it written in the law, the fifth commandment of the law, but also in justice for the widow according to the law in Deuteronomy 10, 17 and 18.

And judgments all throughout the pages of this circus of a mess sometimes, we see all this judgment upon God's people at times rose and fell upon their justice towards the widows.

We see that in Isaiah 1, 17. Look at Jesus Christ, the incarnate God in the flesh, walked this earth and took special care for widows, whether in commending their generosity, commending them for their generosity, like the poor widow with two coins, or commending their persistent prayers of a widow.

Think of Jesus Christ dying on the cross. Of all the things that He could do, He looked down upon His mother and made arrangements for her soon-to-be widowedhood.

Jesus cared deeply for widows. And in fact, the church, the first church controversy was not over the style of music.

[21 : 32] Imagine that, or the colors of the carpet. It was about the widows in Acts 6. There was neglect of widows in the early church.

And friends, we need to be less concerned about these baptism statistics, these church attendance statistics, and be far more concerned about our intentionality towards those who are outcasts in society who have nothing.

Paul helps provide a framework that contrasts those who we need to be focused on.

See, the church cannot sufficiently provide for all. It's impossible for the church to provide for every single need. And so, he provides a systematic framework for the church in Ephesus, and we'll look at that more in depth in a moment.

But if we take a look at the expression of verse 1 and 2 of this intentional respect and apply it into this part of the passage, the most tangible way a church can care for widows, then, is to direct widows back to their families.

[22 : 58] Go to their siblings, or not siblings, sometimes their siblings, but their sons, daughters, their family. And in fact, in verse 8, we see that they're required to help.

In verse 8, it says, but if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever. I mean, this is a serious issue. And so, widows must be directed back to parents. Not to just tell them to move into the spare bedroom, but to figure out a plan of care for them, and not to just leave them to rot and wait till their funeral to say your goodbyes.

See, the home is where the fifth commandment is expressed intentionally, to honor thy father and thy mother. It's within the framework of the family life, the biological family life, which finds its greatest expression within the church family life.

And this honors all who will find their need from their family. In verse 5, we see it saying here, Paul says in verse 5, However, those who are truly widows will be destitutes.

[24 : 27] These are people who are truly in need. They're not looking for a bonus paycheck to get the more suitable car that they liked.

These are people who have absolutely nothing. These are women who express self-denial, not self-indulgence. This is where God's expectation for the church finds its greatest deliberate act of provision to those in need.

The only hope these destitute women have is in God alone. And here, we find that greatest source of provision from the church family. And in verse 7 and 8, this is a command.

He says, command these things as well so that they may be without reproach. In other words, the neglect of widows is the surest sign of reproach to be brought upon the church.

Some churches boast in their baptism stats, their attendance stats. Well, the neglect of widows is the surest sign, according to God's Word and God's metrics of how we're doing.

[25 : 49] This could bring judgment upon a church, just as it would a relative who failed to provide for their widowed relative in verse 8.

They are far worse than an unbeliever. The pagans are doing it better than them. You might say, Brent, why are you so serious about this?

Well, a church's compassionate and intentional care for widows is a spiritual pulse of the church being truly set apart by God.

That the Lord God, if He wants to know how Steel Valley Church is doing, He looks at our intentional care for widows, but also, I think this goes broadly into all those who are outcasts and in need around us.

You see, the expression of a care plan for widows matters because it matters to God. Widows matter to God. And we need to reorient our direction of concern off these worldly stats and upon God's stats, which inquires, how do we care for those who are marginalized in society?

[27 : 06] Which, this naturally leads us into verse 9 and all the way to the end of the passage in verse 16. We see intentionality of mercy ministry.

The church must simply have a plan in place. This is what Paul needed to write to the church in Ephesus, the instructions to the church.

They needed a list, parameters for the list. They needed something formal on how to do this well. How do you get on the list?

Well, he has in verse 9. In order to receive care from the church, the church would need to check off three requirements. It had to do with seniority, it had to be older women, and they'd also have to show maturity in their faith.

Because it's often a maturing aspect in sanctification that we grow dependent on God when our needs are scarce. When all of a sudden we're wondering, I don't know how in the world I'm going to meet the next mortgage payments.

[28 : 16] And I got a family and all these things that are piling up in needs. That's how you learn to trust God in those seasons of trial and struggle.

And so that would obviously need to be an attribute of women needing help. Also, they'd have to have a sense of fidelity. They'd have to be one-man women.

Not sleeping around, not shacking up, and just building their estates. They'd have to be discerning to have good moral fidelity and a reputation of good works.

That they serve others even though they're in need. Like standing in the temple court with two coins. That widow, that poor widow gave more than any of the Pharisees of that day.

That shows the condition of their hearts. And this naturally means that a church's care for widows isn't always to receive direct care. Not only is the church charged to direct widows to their families to be cared for in verse 4, verse 8, and verse 16, but Paul helps guide and inform a church's no in tough circumstances too.

[29 : 35] Did you know that as a church, God has instructed us to use the N-word? No. At times. And it's okay. It's an intentional no. Because God has a different plan for His purposes. In verse 11 through 13, we see the no here.

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 former 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.

The church has to be careful with handling young widows, those young in need, as they would risk losing their affection for God and become idle in their walks in life and faith.

[30 : 40] They would look, these are the young women who look at the older women who are widowed. They have their rent paid for by the church. They have these needs paid for and being a younger woman, that's enticing.

That's a retirement plan for some. Not bad. Living easy. But you see, this goes against even what the Catholics have, how they've reduced in their nunnery that the lowest age, you can invite almost teenagers to the vow of celibacy.

And God's Word is contrary to that notion. It's bad for young women. A true widow taking this course in life is ought to be older in age.

And in fact, Paul was really concerned about this in Ephesus, that the young women who prematurely were added to the list would inherit so much potential of causing problems in the church.

It's not the problems of color of the carpet, but they got time, these young women. And considering in this time period, most of the houses consisted of churches, you had house church here, house church there, house church there.

[32 : 08] You want to talk about how false teaching breeds? It was highly likely that these young widows had the power to destroy an entire group of sound doctrine churches.

This is an inherited problem and potential of a problem of the church being these widows being gossips, busy bodies, all while the church pays their rent.

It's a premature retirement for women will inevitably lead to bad habits. That's a godly statement. That's along the path of godliness. It leads to bad habits.

And for Ephesus, intentionality looked like a systematic approach. They had a list. They held up their list. You might be like, well, does Steel Valley Church have a list? We don't have a list.

Yet! If we need a list, we know how to do it. Right? For emphasis, intentionality looked as a systematic approach of developing that list.

[33 : 13] And it's not a bad idea for such a need that may grow in nature. But what is most important, I believe, is to see that the church has a vital call to be intentional with their mercy ministry.

shame on any church who neglects mercy ministry to care for the needs of anyone around them.

You see, without intentionality, you get false religion. All of this could have been the most legalistic sermon I could have ever preached unless we saw the foundation, the current of this passage being intentionality.

Intentionality changes everything from false religion to true religion. And it is truly a shame in our day and age where religion gets such a bad rap because it was intended to be good and unfortunately has become very legalistic.

it is so important to God. Just as we cannot reject God's good design for men and women in the church based upon bad experiences, the same applies here too.

[34 : 39] We cannot reject religion on behalf of bad religious experiences. That wasn't God's intention. Good religion is built upon intentionality, friends.

We see this in Micah 6 verse 8. The prophet Micah said the Lord requires you to do justice and to love kindly and to walk humbly with your God.

Jesus said the two greatest commandments are to love the Lord your God with all your hearts and your neighbor as yourself. And the apostle James expressed it with very specifics.

He says religion in verse 27 of chapter 1. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

The mercy ministry of a church is the most accurate gauge of spiritual health than any other statistic can provide. And just as last week Paul emphasized godliness within the church, much of that has to do with intentionality, with purpose.

[36 : 11] It answers the why we do it. And it's not just, well, the Bible tells me so. It works down there in children's ministry. It will get you an A and a star for the day.

But it doesn't work in our faith that we live out in our lives. Maybe you attended church today with a little to do on your list.

That checklist mentality which derives from feeble attempts of bad religion. Trying to do something good so maybe God might give you favor with the closing of your house deal.

Maybe you want to take the plunge in baptism. You want to go all out so that God might come in and do something good in your life.

Maybe you're going to empty your check book. To sow a seed so that you can receive. Right? Well, I have you today in a place where I hope you can see all of that is false.

[37 : 34] All of those feeble attempts are false. It's a bad religion. I hope you can see that God's love for the destitute widow should be an expression of God's love for the destitutes who are spiritually destitute in their faith.

You see, the mystery of the gospel is revealed in Jesus Christ alone who came to offer salvation to all. He reached down into history, clothed himself with flesh, and guess who he cared for.

The widows, the outcasts, those who are marginalized in society, and not only that, those who believe in him on account of their faith, they receive forgiveness by simply believing that he died, rose, and ascended to heaven.

Believing the simple gospel. All of that. For the outcasts, those who have nothing can have everything in Jesus Christ.

How great is God's love for you today who walked in with bad religion on your mind? Well, guess what? You can leave with a good dose of good religion with you.

[38 : 57] Believe and receive forgiveness of your sin. And so, I guess I'll close with this. The call of the gospel brings us in by intentional faith.

Not just blind faith, intentional faith, purposeful faith, deliberate faith. What's that faith? In Jesus Christ. So, the call of the gospel brings us in by intentional faith, into intentional relationships, into an intentional community of the family of God, intentional respect, intentional provision, intentional mercy, ministry.

Everything has its purpose. And it expresses God's love to the world by intentional works. This is God's design.

It is intentional, church. May we never forget this. In our yeses to care for needs and provide for people and even our noes, knowing that God has other plans for people who are in need.

depending on their situation. But may we never forget this and trust in God to use us for the proclamation of His mercy that we received from Him towards us, that we bestow upon others.

[40 : 18] The mercy ministry of the church has to be the most intentional statistic that promotes and testifies to spiritual health.

Amen? Let's pray.