

'Honouring One Another

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[0 : 00] Before I start, just out of curiosity, show of hands, who was actually part of the congregation! at 5pm 10 years ago, who was not a staff member then? Alex, Joe, come back to visit, Florence, Gladys, Michelle, is that it? Not Jackson? That's Jackson.

He was still in high school, but he was at the other side. Okay, that's how young you are. High school 10 years ago. Okay, that's good. God willing, I may not be here in 10 years' time, but somebody might ask again 10 years from now who is still here.

Okay, let's get to the passage for today. And I want to begin by thinking about honour and what it means and why we do it. And so to start, I might ask what comes to your mind when we talk about honouring someone? How do we show it?

Well, perhaps it starts with how we address them, right? Using titles like Sir, Your Majesty, Her Royal Highness, things like that.

But also, we can show it, for example, by their position at a table or in a procession. And so traditionally, we say the head of the family should sit at the head of the table.

[1 : 30] That's a place of honour. It's a bit tricky with a round table, but anyway. Honour, therefore, recognises through speech and action an individual's special status, position or achievement that marks them out from others.

It's a sign of respect of who they are and what they've done. And one example, of course, is that we say that Jesus is at the right hand of the Father, because that's a place of honour, isn't it?

And so, by virtue of who he is and what he's done. And so today, as we continue in this chapter, Paul actually turns to this question of honouring one another in God's household.

And we are to do it as part of godliness. So it is actually a continuation from last week. And while certain aspects of what he talks about follows the way the world is, in terms of age and sex, the focus for Paul really is not on symbolism and ceremony, but more actually is how we relate to each other as we live from day to day.

Now, this whole section actually runs all the way to the start of chapter 6, but because of the length, we're going to just look at the first half today. And Paul starts with a general statement on all relationships.

[2 : 55] Then he will turn to the specific example of widows. And then next week, we look at elders and Christian masters. So, verse 1 then, Paul says, Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exalt him as if he were your father.

Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters with absolute purity. This instruction is actually specifically for Timothy in the first place.

He's a young leader who nevertheless has to manage and lead God's household. And so Paul guides him as to how to treat everyone in God's household.

And the pattern of relationships that he sort of advises is very similar to that of a normal household. Right? Fathers and mothers for older men and women.

Brothers and sisters as men and women, younger men and women. Paul, of course, is only dealing with adults here, not children. But these patterns are really quite familiar to everyone, because we all have families, don't we?

[4 : 02] We all belong to a household. But in the church, such relationships are not confined to just blood relations. So, a slave, for example, even though he is not treated as such in a normal household, given that kind of honor, is to be looked upon as a father if he were older, or a brother according to the age.

Likewise, if there was an older widow, who may not be physically the mother of anyone in the church, she is to be treated like a mother, a place of honor or position of honor.

And that's because everyone in God's church belongs to God's household and therefore are to be treated with respect and dignity.

Their status in God's family, as it were, overrides whatever social status or lack thereof that they have in society.

And you notice, too, that the hierarchy is still rather flat, isn't it? It's just mother, father, brother, sister, right? So, someone like Timothy, a young leader, even though he has authority in the church, he has to, for example, look on a slave as if they were older, or if they were older as a father.

[5 : 25] Or, if someone was younger, not look down, but look at him or her as a brother or sister. Now, this doesn't mean, of course, that this is a democracy and everyone has the same authority, but the thing that's of concern here is that of honor, that of how we treat each other, how we speak to one another, how we relate to each other.

And as I said earlier, the goal is still godly relationships, which is why, actually, to look at the very first verse, the older man, even though he is to be respected, is not beyond correction.

But it's the way in which he's to be corrected that is different. So, Timothy is not to rebuke him harshly, but to treat him with respect according to his age, exhort him, if you like, as a father.

The truth, of course, is that the older we get, the more we begin to struggle to keep up with younger adults. All right, I'm speaking personally. And the pace of change in society.

We can't keep up with the latest technology, with what's politically correct to say or not say, with the lingo and the jargon, you know. And so it's tempting, isn't it, to become impatient with us old fogies, but not so with the church and godliness.

[7 : 03] With the older men, Paul is saying motivate rather than rebuke. That is, appeal to their maturity. Say things like, oh, you know, this will be good as an example for the younger ones, rather than to scold them.

Do it for the good of the household. And the same, I guess, applies for the older women as well.

The word treat is actually not in the Greek.

There's actually no verb for that second sentence. It's just younger men as brothers, older men as mothers. And so actually, I think that the verb before actually applies to all the other categories, that we are to exhort them according to where they are in age and their sex.

So the difference really is just whether they're older or younger, whether they're male or female, but in all cases that we are to exhort rather than to rebuke harshly.

And face it, we treat mothers and fathers in a lot of ways in common, don't we? We look up to them, we respect them. But we also do treat our fathers slightly differently to our mothers.

[8 : 13] And so in the case of older women, perhaps the way to do it is to appeal to their maternal instinct, right? And perhaps be more gentle with our words. As blokes, sometimes we get to be bloky with each other, you know, even son and father.

Well, maybe that's not so appropriate with an older woman. Conversely, the tendency when relating to younger people is to treat them like kids who are naive, immature and inexperienced.

And Paul says here that, look, even if that may be true, and yes, younger people of course have less experience, treat them, Timothy, as brothers and sisters, equal with you.

Yeah, maybe it's okay to be a bit more directive when they're younger and firm, but don't be harsh. Try and reason patiently, even though you can see it's so obvious, isn't it, that they should be doing that.

No, reason patiently. Don't run, ride roughshod over them and, you know, pull rank. Just say, oh, because I'm older or because I'm more experienced, just listen to me and shut up, right?

[9 : 21] And this is particularly so when we realize that, yes, younger Christians do look up to their leaders, don't they? And so it's very easy to just pull rank over them rather than to exhort them and be gentle and be patient.

But I think regardless of who we are or where we are in God's household, everyone, Paul is saying, should be treated with honor because ultimately we are one in Christ, equal in God's sight.

All of us have God as our Father, right? It's not like God is our grandfather and someone is in between. Now, right at the end, of course, Paul gives one more additional rider and that is to observe all of this with absolute purity.

Now, again here, it could be a reference to everything or everyone, male, female, because purity isn't just sexual. It can relate to greed and ambition as well, impurity, that is.

But I think given that Timothy here is a young male leader, there is a specific focus here on sexual purity and with regards to how men treat women, younger women in particular.

[10:36] And sadly, even though, as we look at the world, it is possible for women in power to do this, in majority of the cases, it is still a man, isn't it, with power and influence, who is the one that is often seeking to exploit younger and vulnerable women for sexual favors.

And Paul is saying there should be none of this in God's household. And so here, a special word for us male leaders, please don't take advantage of your position because often we physically have more power or we have more dominance in authority.

Don't use your position to get close to another female. Be aware of that position that you hold. Think carefully about invading, for example, personal spaces or even with physical contact.

Absolute purity is what Paul says. All right? And this is true because some of you young people, you may fancy a girl in church or whatever.

However, just be careful if you are a leader. Don't use it for your advantage because you are there to serve the Lord, not for personal gain. Now, you may also be wondering, who is the older man and who is the older woman in this context?

[12:01] And again, I don't think there are hard and fast rules here except to say that as I look out on you all, there are not many older men here, okay? I think most of you can consider yourself, thankfully, to be the younger men and women.

I think maybe Jeff could be considered an older man. But apart from that, there's a few others, but I wouldn't name you, but I can pick on Jeff and myself.

But think of it with reference to Timothy, right? He is a young man himself, and he's looking into the congregation. So the older person is probably the one that is no longer a young father, but someone who could have children that are adults already.

But whatever the case is, I think the overriding principle is still, whether you're young or old, treat one another with gentleness and patience, because that's the godly way.

To be humble and gracious to all, even if you may be more experienced or capable, because we're all equally children of God. And even though I think, again, that Paul here is speaking to Timothy as a leader, this principle, I think, can be applied whether you're in formal leadership or not.

[13:20] That is, all of us should be aiming to treat one another with honour because it is a sign of godliness which pleases God. Now, with those general instructions then, Paul now turns to widows.

Why widows? Possibly because I think it was a particular issue in the church, a presenting issue.

But for me, actually, I want to broaden it, because otherwise we're just going, oh, there's not many widows here at HD 5pm.

There may be one or two. I don't know, but there aren't any, so we don't have to worry about it. I want to broaden it out so that the principles that Paul gives us here, we can actually apply to a wider group.

And the wider group, I think we should think about, are all those who are in need in the church, the vulnerable in our midst. Because, as we heard in Psalm 68, God's heart is set particularly on these people, right?

So looking on the slide, I think, verse 4 onwards, it says, Sing to God, sing in praise of His name, extol Him who rides on the clouds, rejoice before Him, His name is the Lord.

[14:31] And then he says, He is a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His dwelling. God sets the lonely, that's the vulnerable, in families, He leads out the prisoners with sin, but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land.

So I think we need to think wider than just widows. We need to think, who is it that is really in need in our church? And here, when it comes to widows, Paul has two concerns, I think, to balance.

So on the one hand, you have to remember that in those days, when a woman is widowed, and she does not have any family around, she's left really with nowhere to turn, right?

She can't get a job, and she really doesn't need to rely on the mercy of others. And that's why we as a church need to reach out to people like that, because it reflects God's heart.

Widows in those days needed to be honoured, Paul said, and be embraced in God's household, especially if they don't have an earthly household to belong to.

[15:41] So verse 3, chapter 5 says, give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. And literally, the words are, honour widows who are really widows.

That's literally what it says. And I think, to the church's credit at the time, that's what they actually did. But over time, I think what appeared to happen then is that the burden of supporting even the widows who did have families fell on the church.

Because perhaps the families are now thinking, oh great, the church is looking after my widowed mother, I don't have to do it anymore. Well, Paul counters in verse 4, but if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn, first of all, to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family, and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.

And so first, I think Paul appeals to their faith. Caring for their own family is actually putting your religion into practice. Do you say you believe in Jesus?

Well, make sure you look after your family. Right? That is an expression, that is an application of your faith. But second, he's also reminding them that this is a response of gratitude.

[17:02] He's saying, not that they have it at that time, but remember the countless diapers that they changed for you. Every meal they cooked for you while you were growing up. The washing and the ironing and the folding of the clothes too.

School drop-offs. Every treat that you enjoyed, every good thing that they bought for you. While caring for them is simply returning their kindness to you. But thirdly, and I guess most importantly, what you do is actually godliness that pleases God.

God, the one who saved us by his son, is watching from above and taking pleasure in your care of your elderly mother or father. The whole image here is that if you remember the Old Testament when they were offering sacrifices, the Lord said that these are sacrifices that are aroma and pleasing to me.

And these are the same thing, that when you do good deeds, when you look after your family, this is actually an aroma that goes back up to God and is pleasing to him when he sees you as a child of God doing these things.

Because conversely, verse 8, anyone who does not provide for their relatives and especially for their own household has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. And that's a very strong statement, isn't it?

[18:26] He's not saying you're as though you're an unbeliever, you're worse than an unbeliever. Why? Because you're actually being hypocritical. On the one hand, you say you belong to, you know, believe in Jesus, you want to serve God, you're enjoying all the blessings of having God as your father in his household, and then you can't even look after those that are in your own household.

Paul is saying, shame on us if we do that. We're worse than even unbelievers because even they can do that. Now, as I said, widows are simply an example of those in real need, right?

So, just like the orphans and the lonely in Psalm 68, there are others in our midst who are alone or in need in church. Those who are maybe come from overseas and don't have relatives, right?

All by themselves. Some people have disabilities. Maybe even some who are a bit older. All of those people need our care.

And I suppose for us, we need to look beyond the 5 p.m. congregation as well and realize we're part of a bigger church, H.T.D. and St. John's, where there may be older people in other congregations.

[19:42] But I think the same principle applies as well to these people. And that is, the family should take care of them first. It's not that then the church just washes its hands of it, but allowing the family to take that first responsibility is actually giving them the opportunity, isn't it, to please God.

But then, of course, the church should come along and say, look, we will support you in that. And if you need help to do that, we will come in and help you to do that. And that's part of the joy of being part of a church, isn't it?

We're not just a family trying to support everyone in our family, but actually we have the wider church, God's household, supporting one another, doing all this as well. And I know that some of you do do that, and I've seen you do that.

And of course, today in the country like Australia, where thankfully we have a lot of government support, financially, in terms of support programs, the kind of care that we need to give is not just financial, is it, or physical, but spiritual as well, and emotional.

And here, it is tempting, isn't it, if we see that the government, oh no, they've got this age pension or this or whatever, we don't need to worry because they're being provided for, or let the church worry

about it.

[21 : 02] That's not the attitude we should have, is it? But rather, we need to take responsibility for those in need in our family. Support them, help them get those, whatever, access to those programs that need be.

Spend time with them, talking, listening to them, supporting them emotionally, rather than just financially. Okay, Paul then moves on, I think, because he wants to say that then godliness is not just for those giving the care, he wants those receiving care to be godly as well.

And so to the widows, in verse 5, he says, the widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help.

And so, likewise, for those of us who are being cared for, even if we are physically limited in capability, we too are to practice godliness.

Right? It's very easy to look at other people and say, oh, why are they not being godly to me? Well, God's saying, even as people are caring for you, you need to also practice godliness.

[22 : 13] And for the widows, the older ones, it's through prayer and through their faith and hope in God. Because as we do that, we recognize that the help and the care that we're getting from the church or from others is really God's provision to us through them.

Conversely, verse 6, the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. So, while the church is caring for her, that is, keeping her alive physically, she responds by living for pleasure instead, then Paul says, you know, you may be physically alive, but actually you are dead spiritually because you are not living a godly life.

Now, how might living for pleasure look like for these widows? this is what I think Paul fleshes out in verses 9 to 15 because he now distinguishes between how the church is to treat older widows compared to the younger ones.

So, to the older ones, he says in verse 9, no widow may be put on the list of widows unless she's over 60, has been faithful to her husband and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the Lord's people, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.

Now, this list is not a prescription of what a widow needs to do today, right, because it was specific to their time. This is what women and men in those days did to do good deeds.

[23 : 45] Today, we would have another list, you know, that might be helping people to, I don't know, pay their bills online or pick them up and give them transport from doctor's appointments to coming to church and things like that.

So, it's a different list but it gives you a flavour, isn't it, of the kind of good deeds, things that are easily overlooked, not glamorous but important nevertheless.

60 is a sort of a cut-off age which is a rule of thumb, not sort of a precise number but it's saying that at that age it is less likely that a woman will remarry for reasons that we'll get into shortly and to put this widow on the list means she will then become entitled to be cared for by the church.

Now, I don't know exactly what that care looks like but in my mind I imagine perhaps there might be a big house somewhere that the church owns and, you know, the widows will be given a house or room in there and they'll have, you know, be provided for in terms of their essentials, something like that.

But Paul says here that this is not automatically on account of age. It doesn't mean a widow is 60 years old they will get it immediately because evidence of godliness is also required.

[25 : 01] Why? I think because it's still expected that notwithstanding their age if these widows were put on the list and then provided for they would be expected then to contribute back by continuing to do these good deeds.

And so just like elders and deacons in chapter 2 the track record of widows matter as well. Were they faithful to their husbands? Were they full of good deeds while being married?

Because that will show that she will then continue or be expected to continue to care for others even as the church cares for her. And so you see Paul wants these older widows to be godly as well even though they're being cared for.

Now as for the younger widows their godliness lies along another path because Paul urges them to remarry. Verse 11 As for younger widows do not put them on such a list.

Why? Because there is every possibility they will remarry. For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ they want to marry. Thus they bring judgment on themselves because they

have broken their first pledge.

[26 : 11] You see I think when you're put on the list a widow is actually making a pledge even as she's receiving care to serve Christ in the church which if a woman now then marries again she will not be able to do because she'll have to use her time and efforts to care for her own household.

I don't think here that we should be looking critically at younger widows. Paul's not criticizing them but rather he's just acknowledging and recognizing human nature not just of younger widows but of all of us and particularly for young widows how strong the maternal instinct will be and so he's simply encouraging them go and get married because that's more likely what you will want to do once things have settled down but if they are put on the list then they'll have to renege on that pledge.

More than that if too many young widows are being put on the list and then they're all living in the same house kind of thing Paul sees another risk he says besides they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house and not only do they become idlers but also busybodies who talk nonsense saying things they ought not to.

Now again I don't think this is a criticism of young women as though they are sort of busybodies and young men aren't but again it's just to understand that this is how human nature is right I see that happen at Wednesday night MGG's as well over dinner you know the group that's meant to clean up if there were only four or five people in there cleaning up they're always very efficient everyone has a job you know they want to get it done because then they can all go home they know yep it's just the four of us we've got to get it done but what happens when you know sometimes there's 15 16 people in the kitchen productive no we've got two or three standing in the corner chatting then we have a few guys flicking the tiles at each other right again I'm not trying to criticize anyone but that's human nature isn't it when there's not enough work to go around and a few people are idle they start to do things they ought not to right that's just human nature

I would do that too if I'm just standing around I'm bored I'll do that so Paul is just saying yeah if we have too many widows and not enough church work around that's just going to happen so don't put them on the list encourage them to go and be productive by managing a household if they remarry Paul doesn't want the church list to be too large you see for the reason that we'll get to in a short while but for the younger widows they should marry manage their house because otherwise they give the enemy as it says there an opportunity for slander and some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan and again this is not a criticism of the young women it is human nature as well when we're idle when we're not productive there's just an opportunity isn't there for Satan to come in and use that to turn us away from faith and you guys know that like if you're bored and you get online and you start you know surfing the net you surf the wrong things you're right you get yourself into trouble so it's better for you to be productive get off the internet or whatever else you're using to waste time and go and do something that will not allow

[29 : 54] Satan the opportunity to turn you away from the faith finally in verse 16 Paul returns then to the household of God and their responsibility and he says if any woman is a believer who is a believer has widows in her care she should continue to help them and not let the church be burdened with them so that the church can help those widows who are really in need now I'm not sure why it's only a woman who is a believer and has widows in her care I imagine maybe that there were some women who had larger households that could take other widows in but again I think then this principle ought to apply to all of us whether we're men or women and the principle is this that to the extent that we have the means to care for others then let's take the initiative to do that we don't need to wait for the church to put them on a list before we can help them no we can just go approach them see the need approach them take care of them why because then the church can focus their resources on helping those who are really in need that no one else is able to and so that's the same for us as well if you and I know many of you are doing have see people in need and you think you can help that's great but if not then the church will come together put a roster together for example to pick people up to help those really in need but if you on your own bet you can go and offer a lift to someone to bring them to church or to bring them to

Wednesday night go do it so that me as a pastor or Jeff we don't have to try and manage rosters for people to be picked up and all that does that make sense it's about recognizing how best to use the resources that we have as a church now I want to just conclude because sometimes we read this list and we think oh Paul's giving all these strict rules to Timothy and we too need to apply them as though they were rules right strictly followed but I think that would be to misread how these are

being presented because Paul really is giving some very principled approaches to solving the problems and the needs in the church and then sort of mixing it with a healthy dose of common sense and that's a model that we can follow right because not every problem that exists in our church will be in the Bible turn to page 572 to deal with you know when someone has lost a job or whatever it's not that's not how wisdom works is it so what we can do instead is to approach it the way

Paul has done it firstly to think about what is it that we need to do that will reflect the truth of the gospel remember this letter is about Paul saying that the truth matters what is it that we do that will train all of us in godliness and then let's look at the practical situation what the constraints might be what the finite resources were are and then work out the best way to use it so that we get a solution that is sustainable that is manageable that's fair and that channels our collective resources into where the need is greatest all of it really is in the context then to encourage everyone to continue to live a godly life in his household right everyone is to be treated with honour because we are members of God's household saved by the blood of Jesus but then as there are individual situations that arise like widows and those in need we think about how we can then give special honour to these people special attention because God wants us to do that it's his heart to look after the vulnerable next week we will look at elders a slightly different issue and Christian masters but let's finish now and let me just pray for us so that we might be able to wisely apply what Paul has taught us to our own practical situations today

Father we ask that you help us to treat one another with honour to look out for older men as fathers older women as mothers younger men as brothers and younger women as sisters all with absolute purity teach us to care particularly for those of us in our family particularly for our elderly parents or grandparents because of their care that they've shown to us help us as a church to love all that are in God's household especially those who are alone and in real need and please train all of us those giving care those receiving care to lead godly lives to please God to reflect godly conduct in God's household in Jesus name we pray

Amen God that