

Explanatory Notes:**HOW BELIEVERS SHOULD HONOR ELDERLY PEOPLE****Title:** How Believers Should Honor Elderly People**Topic:** Caring for elderly people, especially parents

Bible Verses: 1 Timothy 5:1-16

The world is becoming younger everyday. In most nations, people under 15 years of age make up 30 to 45% of the population.* Many people view youth as desirable and old age as undesirable. They think that to be old is to be worthless to society.** In this “world of the young”, will older people be neglected? What does the Bible say about our responsibility toward elderly people?

The letters of the Apostle Paul give us a glimpse into the life of the early Christian church. In one letter, Paul wrote to Timothy, his fellow church leader, with instructions on the care of elderly people. There were many widows who needed financial help. Please listen to these words from the Bible:

The church should care for any widow who has no one else to care for her. But if she has children or grandchildren, their first responsibility is to show godliness at home and repay their parents by taking care of them. This is something that pleases God very much.

But a woman who is a true widow, one who is truly alone in this world, has placed her hope in God. Night and day she asks God for help and spends much time in prayer. But the widow who lives only for pleasure is spiritually dead. Give these instructions to the church so that the widows you support will not be criticized.

But those who won't care for their own relatives, especially those living in the same household, have

*This statistic is based on the United Nations report on youth and elderly populations. If you have Internet access, you can look up the figures for your country/countries at the following website:

<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demo-graphic/social/youth.htm>

**The term ‘age-ism’ was coined by R. N. Butler to refer to these types of prejudice and discrimination against people on account of their age.

Producers: You might create a broadcast with practical tips for families on helping elderly family members. Here are some basic facts on the problems associated with aging, and advice on how to help elderly parents. Can you think of examples and illustrations that could highlight these problems and words of advice?

Problems elderly people face:

- **Deterioration of health**
- **Decreasing involvement** in favorite activities
- **Increased dependence** on others

denied what we believe. Such people are worse than unbelievers. A widow who is put on the list for support must be a woman who is at least sixty years old and was faithful to her husband. She must be well respected by everyone because of the good she has done. Has she brought up her children well? Has she been kind to strangers? Has she served other Christians humbly? Has she helped those who are in trouble? Has she always been ready to do good?

1 Timothy 5:3-10, NLT

From these words of Paul, we discover three important truths:

1. THE CHURCH SHOULD SUPPORT ELDERLY PEOPLE

The first truth we discover from Paul's advice to Timothy is that **the church has a responsibility to care for its elderly people who have nowhere else to turn for support.** Paul writes, *"The church should care for any widow who has no one else to care for her."* In the ancient world, there were no government welfare programs as there are in many countries today. The responsibility to help the poor and destitute fell solely on the family and the church. And in ancient times, the two most needy groups of people were widows and orphans.

Many commentators think that there was an official church order of widows appointed to carry out a ministry of prayer and service. The church gave them financial assistance. Paul gave Timothy two requirements for adding people to this order of widows.

A. The first requirement was that they had to be at least 60 years old. Of course, he wasn't denying the church's aid to needy widows who were younger than 60. The church should always notice and assist needy people of all ages. Paul was not setting a fixed age of 60 years old for widows of all times and places. In some countries today where life expectancy is lower, women under 60 should be considered 'old' and deserving of the church's aid. In some countries

- **Shame:** some feel ashamed to be a financial burden for their children
- **Decreased mobility**
- **Loss of contact** with friends and former co-workers.
- **Loneliness**
- **Confinement** to their own home, or to a nursing home or a hospital bed.
- **Grief** as their friends and family members grow old and die
- **Loss of income** after retirement
- **Loss of identity and purpose** due to retirement
- **Age-ism--** discrimination and prejudice against them because they are old
- **Dissatisfaction** as they reflect on mistakes they made in their lives

Problems adult children of elderly parents face:

- The **financial burden** of caring for elderly parents. This is intensified when the children have children of their own who depend on their help. They feel 'caught in the middle' because they are supporting both their parents and their children.
- Elderly **parents' expectations** are often different from their children's expectations.

60 is not considered old at all!

Paul simply wished to limit the church order of praying widows to those who would not be likely to neglect their ministry or misuse the financial aid they were given. He later tells Timothy not to include younger widows in the list because their desire to remarry will distract them from their prayer ministry.

B. Paul required that widows be godly people ‘respected by everyone’ in order to receive church support. He didn’t want to give non-Christian neighbors any reason to grumble against the church. So he didn’t want the church to support widows who lived in ways that dishonor God and who acquired bad reputations. He wanted outsiders to see that the church was caring for the elderly people who most deserved to be helped. This leads us to our next point.

2. ELDERLY PEOPLE SHOULD PUT PRAYER BEFORE PLEASURE

The second principle we discover from Paul’s advice to Timothy is that **elderly people must put prayer before pleasure.** Paul was concerned that the women included in this order of widows should be faithful in carrying out the ministry of prayer. They should not use their time to gratify their selfish desires.

In the same way elderly people today should serve the church faithfully. It is a shame that many elderly people wish to spend their old age doing nothing but resting or having fun. It is selfish to think, as some do, “I worked hard for many years. Now I am old and retired. Now I will live only for myself. I deserve it. I’ve done enough.”

Older people have many wonderful opportunities to serve God with their time, wisdom and talents. They have wisdom that comes from many years of experience. They have time to do volunteer activities that busy working people cannot undertake. If you are an older person listening today, praise God! Your life has great purpose! Use the many gifts God has given you to serve him according to your ability. Be diligent in praying for the

Elderly parents’ expectations are often greater than what their children can do for them. This can produce conflicts. Many children feel guilt because they cannot meet their parents’ unreasonable demands.

- In some modern societies, where life is fast-paced and filled with busyness, caring for the elderly in the home can become too **stressful** for the family. It often becomes necessary for the family to send their elderly parents to nursing homes where they can receive professional care. This care is very costly. Most of the children who do this feel great guilt and shame because they are unable to keep their parents in the home. Perhaps your culture disapproves of this practice.

Tips on caring for elderly parents:

- **Be available** for them. Give them your time, your affection, and your respect. Reassure them that you care about them.
- If you have long-standing differences or conflicts with your parents, **work through** these **conflicts** in love. Forgive them if they have wronged you. If they are weak and dependent upon you, you may be tempted to mistreat them or control them in order to seek revenge for the ways in which they have wronged you in the past. Don’t do this! Remember the Bible’s teachings on revenge

needs of your church. Be active in the life of your congregation. You will bring delight and blessings to others around you, and your reward will be great in heaven.

3. FAMILIES SHOULD SUPPORT THEIR ELDERLY MEMBERS

The third truth we discover from these words of Paul to Timothy is that families have the primary responsibility to care for elderly people. Paul says that *“their first responsibility is to show godliness at home and repay their parents by taking care of them. This is something that pleases God very much.”* Paul felt that our care for our family members is so important that, in his words, *“those who won’t care for their own relatives, especially those living in the same household, have denied what we believe. Such people are worse than unbelievers.”*

Paul used very strong words to condemn those who neglect the needs of their family members. Why did he say that such people are worse than unbelievers? Because even unbelievers in his day took care of their family members. Shouldn’t we expect Christian believers to have a lifestyle that surpasses that of unbelievers around them? But if we don’t even take care of our own families, we are acting worse than unbelievers. By living this way, we communicate to others that being a Christian doesn’t make us better people – it makes us worse!

The Apostle Paul was concerned to make sure that the church would not have to give financial support to people who can find help from their own families. This is not a responsibility that the church should be burdened with. The church already has many needier people to help. Paul says in verse 16: *“If a Christian woman has relatives who are widows, she must take care of them and not put the responsibility on the church. **Then the church can care for widows who are truly alone.**”*

Conclusion:

God cares deeply for elderly people.

- He wants us to care for the elderly people among us. This involves cooperation between families and

(Leviticus 19:18, Romans 12:17-19).

- **Ask their forgiveness** for the times in the past when you have wronged them. Do what you can to heal whatever old conflicts you have with them.
- As you begin to welcome your parents in your home, **discuss openly with them about their expectations and yours.** Be sure you all have the same expectations about their responsibilities and yours. This will help avoid conflict and frustrations that come from differing expectations.
- Do everything you can to help your parents, but **be careful not to let them burden you** with unreasonable demands.
- **Be patient and sensitive** with them. Remember that you have never experienced this stage of life. You will have much to learn about how people experience this stage of life.
- **Learn as much as you can about old age,** its joys and its difficulties.
- **Ask your elderly parents to share their wisdom** and experience for the benefit of the family. Listen carefully to their wise advice! They have had more time to live and reflect on life.
- **Include them** as much as possible **in the decisions that you make concerning**

- churches.
- He also wants elderly people to serve in the church. He wants them to use their spiritual gifts to bring his blessings to people's lives.

[Producers: conclude with a prayer for the needs of the elderly. Pray that the church will always fulfill its responsibility to care for them.]

their future. They should have a voice in the decisions that affect them. They also need to know that their opinions are valued.

- **Thank them when they help out** in the home. Let them know you appreciate what they do.