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## I Timothy 5:3-4, 8, 16 “Honoring Our Elderly Mothers”

Intro. Which is the fastest growing age group in America? Believe it or not, it is those 65 and older. The baby boomers are now as old as 73. What is going to happen to an ever-increasing population of older Americans? If we do not get back to the biblical pattern of caring for our elderly parents and grandparents, the government will run out of money, or taxes will go up, and regardless, many more elderly people will be neglected.

So I begin this morning I want to look back at 3:14-15, “These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” As you can see, Paul’s first letter to Timothy mostly has to do with proper conduct in relationship to the Church of the living God. Yet as you can see from my text today, Paul also tells us a few things about how we ought to conduct ourselves in our family life. So much of what I will say today will deal with practical Christian living.

Now since this is Mother’s Day, I have selected this text of Scripture, because it relates to our responsibilities to our mothers, and in particular our elder mothers and grandmothers. So I will take an approach to a Mother’s Day message that is different in focus from most others I have preached. I will not talk about how to be a good mother. Nor will my focus be on honoring our mother in terms of words or gestures of respect. Instead, I will mainly talk about our Christian responsibility toward our elderly mothers and grandmothers. The Bible does have some important instruction about this, and our society is getting further and further away from the Biblical standard. We need to make sure that in our relationships to our elderly mothers and grandmothers, we follow God’s standard, and not the world’s standard.

So what are our responsibilities, especially toward our elderly mothers and grandmothers? Let’s look into our text of Scripture together and see first of all:

### I. THE PRINCIPLES OF FAMILY LIFE GIVEN

I want to share with you four principles of family living that Paul gives us in this text of Scripture, which special focus on our responsibilities toward our mothers:

A. First Show Piety at Home – I want to zero in on one phrase and draw from it an important principle. Paul wrote in v.4, “But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home.” The word translated “show piety” (*eusebeo*) means “to act piously or reverently; to be godly.” And the word “first” (*proton*) points to the fact that our obligation to family is primary in terms of exercising Christian virtue and godliness. The duties of the family, the first institution of creation, have priority over other duties.

Now the lesson is this: we should make sure that we practice our Christianity first and foremost within our own family. Something is wrong when we fight like cats and dogs at home, and then come to church on Sunday morning and treat others better than we treat our own family members! So let me ask you, “Are you at least as much of a Christian at home as you are in the presence of other Christians?” If not, you need to rethink what your spiritual priorities should be.

Another basic principle that I want to share with you is this:

B. Support Your Family – Paul says in v.8, “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” The word translated “provide” (*pronoeo*) literally means “to take thought for, to think of beforehand.” It refers to making adequate provision for the future needs of yourself and others. The father in particular should work to provide food, clothing, shelter, and the other needs of your family. Provision for one’s own immediate family circle is an indisputable Christian duty. A man that fathers children and then doesn’t provide for their needs is a jerk! I hate to think what it will be like on judgment day for all the deadbeat dads who will stand before Jesus Christ, who worked in a carpenter’s shop and probably supported his widowed mother, and perhaps some of his younger brothers and sisters.

Now in a little while, I will apply the teaching of this verse and v.4 to the fact that we should not only provide for our children, but the time will come when we should help care for the needs of our *parents*. But let share with you from v.8 that parents have an important responsibility to provide for their own financial support whenever possible. I get this from the word “provide.” Again, it literally means, “to think of beforehand” and thus “to plan ahead.” I believe that means that you should plan ahead for your retirement and elderly years, putting money aside into a retirement account, so that you will not burden your children financially. That fulfills the spirit of v.8. Yet 42% of adults aren't saving for retirement at all, according to a report by the Center for Financial Services Innovation.<sup>1</sup> Most will receive a Social Security income, but that is inadequate. So such people are counting on their children or the state to take care of them in their old age! I realize that many of that 42% are living from paycheck to paycheck, but most can save at least some in an IRA. Lower income folks can even qualify for the government to contribute a portion of your contributions through tax credits!

C. Support Your Elderly Parents When in Need – Paul says in v.4, “But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home....” The apostle makes it quite clear that when widows have close relatives, these relatives must accept the responsibility to support them, not the church. Also, the word translated “grandchildren” (*ekgonon*) or “nephews” (KJV) is a general term denoting “descendants” and would indeed be better rendered “grandchildren”, while the word translated “parents” (*progonoi*) is equally general for “progenitors”. Responsibility for parents, which is carried over to the second and even third generations, has the divine endorsement.

Let me give a practical reason why you should help care for your aged parents and grandparents. More than likely the day is coming when you will grow old. Your children will tend to treat you the way you have treated your parents. We tend to reap what we have sown! So treat your elderly parents well, and hopefully your children will follow your example when you become old.

Yet I want to address what elderly parents should do when you need support and care from your children. I believe that you should be willing to move, if need be, to be close to them. Let me explain why. We live in an increasingly mobile society, and most grown children no longer live near their parents. And when your children marry, their priority shifts from parent to spouse. Jesus quotes from Genesis in Mt. 19:5-6, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”? So then, they are no

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<sup>1</sup> [www.fool.com/retirement/2019/01/28/you-wont-believe-how-many-americans-have-no-retire.aspx](http://www.fool.com/retirement/2019/01/28/you-wont-believe-how-many-americans-have-no-retire.aspx).

longer two but one flesh.” Then He adds his own comment by way of application, “Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.” The family relationship that is permanent and takes priority is not the parent-child relationship but the husband-wife. So especially in situations where your grown children are married and still working, you need to move closer to them rather than expecting them to move close to you.

My great grandmother Tidwell became a widow at the age of 55. She went on to live 17 more years. Meanwhile, about 7 years into her widowhood, her only daughter, who was my grandmother, moved to Nashville, TN with her husband and daughter, because the shoe factory in Georgia where he worked closed, and he got a job there in Nashville. I was told by my mother that one reason my grandmother left her husband and moved back to Georgia a couple of years later was to care for her mother. That resulted in a divorce. Then when my grandmother got too old to care for herself, my mother said that my grandmother expected her to leave my dad and go to Gainesville to care for her in her home. Instead, my mother moved her mother into a care facility near my brother, in little closer to her home. While mother did make regular trips to Cumming to visit her mother, she did not leave my dad for what turned out to be a year or more, and I believe in her situation she did the right thing.

So you need to ask yourself, “Will the care of my mother or father lead to the long-term neglect of my spouse? If the answer is Yes, you need to look for alternatives to their care. Ideally an unmarried, retired sibling should assume their primary care. Or when their care become too difficult, they need to be placed in a skilled care facility.

D. The Church Should Support Poor, Godly Widows Without Family – Paul says in v.3, “Honor widows who are really widows.” In the Old Testament there is an abundant amount of evidence of God’s concern for the widows. He gave laws protecting them and making a way for them to feed themselves (gleaning, etc.). He rebuked those who oppressed them. No people has ever cared more for its needy and its aged than the Jews. The Christian Church inherited a fine tradition of charity to widows and others in need. And so in the early church widows were not forgotten, as we can see from Acts 6 and other Scripture passages. James indicates that one evidence of true religion is “to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction” (James 1:27).

So what does our text teach us here about the church’s responsibility to widows? I believe that we need to first define what Paul means by the word “honor” in v.3. The word “honor” (*timao*) means “to fix the value of” and thus “to honor, revere, venerate.” Since it has idea of properly appreciating the value of someone, the word can refer to giving financial support, as in vv.17-18. Such a meaning is reflected in our word honorarium. In light of v.4 and the context, it probably carries the literal meaning of “price or value.” In fact, in Acts 5:2 & 19:19 the word is translated “price,” and refers clearly to monetary support. So in this context it refers to giving honor in terms of financial support.

And who are we as a church to so “honor” or help financially? First of all, only those who are “really” widows. The real widow is the one who does not have any family to help in her support. Her only hope is for God to provide for her through His people. It is to be noted that the Church did not propose to assume responsibility for older people whose children were alive and well able to support them. In fact, v.16 says, “If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows.”

Furthermore, Paul limits the church’s obligation further by giving some qualifications for widows receiving financial support from the church in vv.9-10, “Do not let a widow under sixty

years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work." If she has shown love and care for others, then she certainly should have love and care shown to her by God's people!

By the way, Paul seems to give a biblical definition of a senior citizen, when they turn 60! So ladies, when you turn 60, you need to embrace your senior status and sing in the Senior Adult choir, and come to Twilights!

It appears that such widows are to serve the Lord in light of the support they receive from the church. One ministry they are to engage in is prayer. Paul says in v.5, "Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day." This is also implied by the list of qualifications in v.10.

Honestly, few churches follow this teaching regarding certain widows. After all, we live in a time when politicians, especially socialists, have shifted more and more responsibility from the family and church to the state. In our society government has replaced God, which may be good materially, but not spiritually. But in Paul's day such widow had little choice but to put her hope in God (perfect tense). However, I certainly cannot blame anyone for utilizing the resources of the state that are made available for the aged, as long as those resources are properly obtained. However, our church has given temporary assistance to widows from time to time. We have done so through the benevolence fund. Your gifts to that fund make it possible.

## II. THE MOTIVATION FOR GODLY FAMILY LIVING

Now why should we unselfishly care for our loved ones, including our elderly parents and grandparents? Well Paul gives us several good reasons for doing so.

A. Doing Right Is Good and Acceptable to God – That's what Paul says in the last of v.4. It is acceptable before God in view of the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment, "Honor your father and your mother." The place of the Greek accent leads some scholars and translators to prefer the rendering "pleasing" to "acceptable."<sup>2</sup> This avoids giving the impression of any kind of justification by works. After all, we are "accepted" by God by virtue of our faith relationship with Christ, and not by our works. Paul combined "acceptable and pleasing" in Philippians 4:18. In Romans 12:1 "acceptable" means "pleasing." "Acceptable before God" yields the pleasing picture of God watching men and giving a glad welcome ("acceptance") to their works when they come to His heavenly home.

So if you want to please God, do what God commands here in regard to family obligations. We have a number of people here today who have faithfully and unselfishly cared for your aged parents, and I want you to know how much God is pleased with your good work! My wife Cheryl has done so for ten years so far. Sheila Soloe is another recent example. Know that giving love and care to your elderly parents pleases God, and He will reward you.

B. It Is a Just Compensation to Your Parents – Again, Paul says in v.4, "But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents...." The word "repay" (*apodidomi*) literally means "to give off from" one's self. It is

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. 2:3, where the same word is used, "For this [intercessory prayer] is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior."

used of discharging one's obligations, such as paying a debt. Any parent knows of the sacrifice involved in raising children. Parents give love, shelter, home and security. Not to mention the *time* involved in raising a child, it now costs about a quarter of a million dollars to raise a child! So helping your parents in their elder years is a way to repay them for the love received in time of need; and only *with* love can love be repaid.

The amount of time and service mothers gives reminds me of the story about what one child said to another. She said, "I'm really worried. My mom works all day, comes home to make us supper, then she cleans the house and washes the clothes." Her friend said, "What are you worried about? Sounds to me like you have it made." Her friend said, "What if she tries to escape?"<sup>3</sup>

Oh, and just about the time a mother thinks her work is done—she becomes a grandmother!<sup>4</sup> So grandchildren also have some repaying to do toward their grandparents! Grandparents are often quite generous toward their grandchildren in time and money! When children or grandchildren help their aging parents or grandparents, it is a token of love and appreciation for the help and sacrifice that their parents gave to them.

Yes, mothers and grandmothers have earned our help and support in their old age! It is only just and right. Insure.com's Mother's Day Index estimates that it would cost over \$67,000 a year to hire someone to do all the household tasks that Mom does for free: cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, kissing boo-boos, and so forth.<sup>5</sup> So you owe you mom big time!

Finally, Paul also gives motivation in terms of negative consequences:

### C. A Failure To Help a Loved One in Need:

1. Causes You to Deny the Faith – Paul says in v.8, "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith...." Some deny the faith by what they *do* rather than by what they *say*. Paul said in Titus 1:16, "They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him...." As Paul saw it, the person who does not provide for the widows who are related to him has disowned the faith, whatever he may actually say. Deeds speak more loudly than words. Faith without works is dead and useless. A true believer will demonstrate true faith by good works, and good works should begin at home. By refusing the natural duties which Christian faith implies, one practically denies his possession of faith. Lack of positive action gives the lie to any profession of faith.

So I ask you, "Does your family life confirm or deny that you are a true believer?"

2. Makes You Worse Than an Unbeliever – That's what Paul says in the last of v.8. A professing Christian who does not help his own family is worse than an unbeliever for the following reasons: it probably shows that the person is not a true believer, and therefore lost in sin. He will also incur greater judgment for his hypocrisy. Furthermore, even most unbelievers take care of their own. For example, it was Greek law from the time of Solon (594 B.C.) that sons and daughters were, not only morally, but also legally bound to support their elderly parents. Anyone who refused that duty lost his civil rights. So to fail to take care of your aging parents would be worse than most unbelievers.

Conclusion: So I encourage you to be sure that you practice your Christian faith first in your own family. Honor your father and mother, not just with words, but with love and care in times of

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<sup>3</sup> "To Illustrate" by J. Michael Shannon, *Preaching Magazine*, May/June 2011, page 57

<sup>4</sup> Old Union Reminder in *Pulpit Helps*.

<sup>5</sup> Readers' Digest, 9/2018, p.117

need, especially when they grow dependent on you. If you do, God will be pleased, and you will be rewarded!

Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters to Timothy, Titus, & Philemon* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975); Donald Guthrie, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: 1-II Timothy, Titus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1957); H. A. Ironside, *Addresses on the First and Second Epistles of Timothy* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1947); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Donald A. Ward, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* (Waco: Word Books, 1974); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament: The Pastoral Epistles* in Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). Nothing available from Maclaren.

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