

## FIRST TIMOTHY CHAPTER FIVE

### Honor Women, Orphans, Parents, and Those in Need 1 Timothy 5:1-4

Have you ever wondered why we often refer to the people in our fellowship as the “*church family*”? The idea of a “*family of God*” grows out of a number of scripture references. For example:

John 1:12 NAS:

*But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.*

Mark 3:35 NAS:

[Jesus speaking] *"For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother."*

Romans 8:15-16 NAS:

<sup>15</sup> *For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"*

<sup>16</sup> *The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.*

We refer to fellow Christians as “*brothers and sisters,*” as in the book of James.

James 2:15-16 NAS:

<sup>15</sup> *If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,*

<sup>16</sup> *and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?*

If most of our relatives are unsaved, then when we participate in a healthy, dynamic church many of us come to feel that the church is more our family than our flesh and blood relatives are.

So you see there are a number of reasons why we talk about the “*church family.*” First Timothy chapter five also shows us just how scriptural it is to consider the church as a family. Paul tells Timothy to relate to various people in the Church as he would to family members. So let us begin by reading the chapter.

1 Timothy 5:1-25 NAS:

<sup>1</sup> *Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a*

*father, to the younger men as brothers,*

*<sup>2</sup> the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity.*

*<sup>3</sup> Honor widows who are widows indeed;*

*<sup>4</sup> 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.*

*<sup>5</sup> 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.*

*<sup>6</sup> But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives.*

*<sup>7</sup> Prescribe these things as well, so that they may be above reproach.*

*<sup>8</sup> 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.*

*<sup>9</sup> 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,*

*<sup>10</sup> 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.*

*<sup>11</sup> But refuse to put younger widows on the list, for when they feel sensual desires in disregard of Christ, they want to get married,*

*<sup>12</sup> thus incurring condemnation, because they have set aside their previous pledge.*

*<sup>13</sup> 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.*

*<sup>14</sup> Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach;*

*<sup>15</sup> for some have already turned aside to follow Satan.*

*<sup>16</sup> 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.*

*<sup>17</sup> The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.*

*<sup>18</sup> For the Scripture says, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages."*

*<sup>19</sup> Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses.*

*<sup>20</sup> Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning.*

*<sup>21</sup> I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality.*

*<sup>22</sup> Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin.*

<sup>23</sup> *No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.*

<sup>24</sup> *The sins of some men are quite evident, going before them to judgment; for others, their sins follow after.*

<sup>25</sup> *Likewise also, deeds that are good are quite evident, and those which are otherwise cannot be concealed.*

You can see in this chapter that Paul is getting very practical with Timothy, telling him how to deal with the various people in the church. So now we will take a closer look at this advice.

1 Timothy 5:1-8 NAS:

<sup>1</sup> *Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers,*

<sup>2</sup> *the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity.*

<sup>3</sup> **Honor widows** who are widows indeed;

<sup>4</sup> *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.*

<sup>5</sup> *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.*

<sup>6</sup> **But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives.**

<sup>7</sup> *Prescribe these things as well, so that they may be above reproach.*

**<sup>8</sup> *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.***

One of the Ten Commandments is to “*honor your father and mother*” (Exodus 20:12). **We are to treat our parents with respect.** Paul had instructed Timothy to “*set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity*” (4:12 NIV). The wise apostle knew that for this young minister to remain above reproach in dealing with the variety of people in his church, he would have to treat them as family. “*Speak harshly*” in verse 1 refers to “*verbal pounding,*” or disrespectful treatment. If correction became necessary, Timothy should not speak harshly; instead, he should appeal to the older men with kind exhortation, as if he were speaking to his father. Even correction or rebuke was to be phrased in encouraging terms, coupled with respect and courtesy.

In the same way, Timothy was to speak kindly to younger men, as if they were his brothers. He was to lead them gently. Without using the specific term, Paul was speaking about submission. Timothy was to practice gentleness in correcting his seniors. He was to do the same in treating his juniors.

Mark 10:43-45 NAS:

<sup>43</sup> *“But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great*

*among you shall be your servant;*

<sup>44</sup> *and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all.*

<sup>45</sup> *"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*

The same directions hold true today. In whatever situation we find ourselves we should not seek control over others. Instead, we should treat others as we want to be treated. We should serve instead of insisting on being served.

You probably noticed that a large percentage of this chapter deals with how to treat women. In the culture of that day, as in some cultures today, women were devalued and treated as second-class citizens. But Jesus set the example. He recognized the value of women. They were no longer to be treated as property and, therefore, no longer to be demeaned. Paul felt the same way and advised Timothy how he should treat the women in his church. Perhaps we might understand this better if we were to interpret these verses as if these people were members of Timothy's family, which of course they are as we share the same Father. **You may remember that Timothy had a close relationship with both his mother and his grandmother** (2 Timothy 1:5).

Paul was aware of the respect that was necessary for families to survive. Healthy relationships between sons, fathers, daughters, and mothers were good examples of how to treat others. Men who consider women to be their sisters in the family of God will treat them with respect, protecting and encouraging them to grow in faith. Believers are to guard one another against sexual exploitation in the same way that we would protect a family member. Depending on the culture, certain members may require special protection. In our own culture, women and children have often been subjects of mistreatment. We are to pursue each other's best interests and development as people. The same guidelines that guard families from immorality can protect our relationships within the body of Christ. Inappropriate sexual conduct would surely hinder a person's spiritual growth. There should be no sex outside of marriage, and even lustful thoughts are prohibited (Matthew 5:28). Pursuing uncomfortable verbal intimacies or suggestive conversations, even if not accompanied by physical contact, can be harmful to another believer, hindering his or her spiritual growth and blocking further ministry. Respectful behavior in any relationship requires a respect for privacy. **Especially in relating to women the emphasis is to be on their personhood rather than their sexuality.** Counseling or visitation one-on-one with members of the opposite sex should always be done with another person present.

Those who are helpless and in need, especially widows and orphans, have always received God's special care. Paul's insistence in verses 3-8 rested on the numerous Old Testament passages where God had made known His will in these specific matters. Note the following verses from God's law:

Deuteronomy 10:17-19 NAS:

<sup>17</sup> *"For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe.*

<sup>18</sup> ***He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing.***

<sup>19</sup> ***So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.***

Deuteronomy 14:28-29 NAS:

<sup>28</sup> ***At the end of every third year you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in that year, and shall deposit it in your town.***

<sup>29</sup> ***The Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance among you, and the alien, the orphan and the widow who are in your town, shall come and eat and be satisfied, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.***

Deuteronomy 24:17-22 NAS:

<sup>17</sup> ***You shall not pervert the justice due an alien or an orphan, nor take a widow's garment in pledge.***

<sup>18</sup> ***But you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and that the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing.***

<sup>19</sup> ***When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; **it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow,** in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.***

<sup>20</sup> ***When you beat your olive tree, you shall not go over the boughs again; **it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow.*****

<sup>21</sup> ***When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not go over it again; **it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow.*****

<sup>22</sup> ***You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing.***

So after farmers had harvested their crops, widows and their children would go into the fields and gather the leftovers for their food. This was called **“gleaning.”** It provided for those who had no other means to feed themselves. Then we see that New Testament Christians also were to care for each other.

Acts 2:44-47 NAS:

<sup>44</sup> ***And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common;***

<sup>45</sup> ***and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.***

<sup>46</sup> ***Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart,***

<sup>47</sup> ***praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.***

1 Corinthians 16:1-4 NLT:

<sup>1</sup> *Now regarding your question about the money being collected for God's people in Jerusalem. You should follow the same procedure I gave to the churches in Galatia.*

<sup>2</sup> ***On the first day of each week, you should each put aside a portion of the money you have earned. Don't wait until I get there and then try to collect it all at once.***

<sup>3</sup> *When I come, I will write letters of recommendation for the messengers you choose to deliver your gift to Jerusalem.*

<sup>4</sup> *And if it seems appropriate for me to go along, they can travel with me.*

Acts 6:1-3 NLT:

<sup>1</sup> *But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. The Greek-speaking believers complained about the Hebrew-speaking believers, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food.*

<sup>2</sup> *So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers. They said, "We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program.*

<sup>3</sup> *And so, brothers, select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will give them this responsibility.*

In those days widows usually had no source of income to support themselves. But the care of widows was apparently becoming a major burden to the congregation in Ephesus and called for clarification as to who was really a widow qualifying for support. Paul advised Timothy to identify those widows who were *really widows*, "a widow indeed" (verse 5), and help them. The responsibility for caring for the helpless naturally falls first on their own families, the people whose lives are most closely linked with theirs. Paul stressed the importance of families caring for the needs of widows and not leaving it for the church to do, so that the church can care for widows "who are really in need"—those who have no families. A widow who had no children or other family members to support her was doomed to poverty.

We should support those who have no families and should also help the elderly, young, disabled, ill, or poverty-stricken with their emotional and spiritual needs. Often families who are caring for their own have heavy burdens. They may need extra money, a listening ear, a helping hand, or a word of encouragement. Interestingly, people who are helped often turn around and help others, turning the church into more of a caring community. Don't wait for people to ask. Take the initiative and look for ways to serve them.<sup>1</sup>

The church should care for such widows by giving both respectful care and material support. Their worth to the body of Christ was to be demonstrated in every way possible.

<sup>1</sup> Bruce B. Barton, David R. Veerman, Neil Wilson, *Life Application Bible Commentary – 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1993), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "1 TIMOTHY 5:1-6:2".

**A widow who had children or grandchildren should be able to look to them for support. By caring for their widowed mother or grandmother, these children would be putting their own religion into practice.** Paul pointed to the cycle of life as an opportunity to practice obedience to God and to show appreciation to our parents for earlier care. Our parents watched over us when we were helpless. We ought to do no less when the roles are reversed. Family members should look after their parents and grandparents. Paul affirmed this as basic common sense understood even by those who were unbelievers (1 Timothy 5:8). Remember that the fifth commandment is still a commandment.

Exodus 20:12 NAS:

<sup>12</sup> ***“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.***

Matthew 15:1-6 NLT:

<sup>1</sup> *Some Pharisees and teachers of religious law now arrived from Jerusalem to see Jesus.*

<sup>2</sup> *“Why do your disciples disobey our age-old tradition?” they demanded. “They ignore our tradition of ceremonial hand washing before they eat.”*

<sup>3</sup> *Jesus replied, “And why do you, by your traditions, violate the direct commandments of God?”*

<sup>4</sup> *For instance, God says, ‘**Honor your father and mother, and Anyone who speaks disrespectfully of father or mother must be put to death.**’*

<sup>5</sup> *But you say it is all right for people to say to their parents, ‘Sorry, I can’t help you. For I have vowed to give to God what I would have given to you.’*

<sup>6</sup> *In this way, you say they don’t need to honor their parents. And so you cancel the word of God for the sake of your own tradition.”*

**Paul wanted Christian families to care for one another.** He insisted that children and grandchildren take care of the widows in their families; he suggested that younger widows remarry and start new families.

1 Timothy 5:14-16 NLT:

<sup>14</sup> *So I advise these younger widows to marry again, have children, and take care of their own homes. Then the enemy will not be able to say anything against them.*

<sup>15</sup> *For I am afraid that some of them have already gone astray and now follow Satan.*

<sup>16</sup> *If a woman who is a believer 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 the widows who are truly alone.*

Paul made it clear, however, that the church was not to support those who were lazy and

refused to work, male or female.

2 Thessalonians 3:10 NAS:

<sup>10</sup> For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.

Members of the church are expected to work hard and to be as independent as possible, so they can adequately care for themselves and for less fortunate members. When church members are both responsible and generous, everyone's needs will be met.<sup>2</sup>

It is most unfortunate that Christian families allow their parents to waste away in loneliness in nursing homes. Elderly parents need more than economic attention. They need love, companionship, and moral support as they face the challenges of aging and declining health and strength. Not too long ago, families lived in the same community, rather than being scattered all over the country. It was easier for the extended family to be supportive of one another when challenges arose. Today, to the best degree it is able, the church should identify and call to accountability those who are shirking their family duties.

Churches can offer very practical help to those without a mate. Help usually comes when people are informed. **So it is important for church leaders to ask about the specific needs of members of the congregation who are living alone.** Churches should help grieving members when they lose a loved one immediately and with long-term recovery. We often do pretty well at rallying around a grieving person at the time of the funeral, but we tend to forget that the grieving process can take a year, and often longer for those who were married for a long time.

These are just a few of the ways that the Church can be the supportive family that each Christian needs. Let us all prayerfully seek the Lord's guidance for how we are to be obedient to this scripture passage, and for how to relate both to our family members as well as to others in the fellowship of believers.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.