



First Baptist Church Selmer

"ORDER IN THE... CHURCH!" • SUPPORTIVE FAMILY • 1 TIMOTHY 5:1-20 • 5/5/2024

MAIN POINT

A healthy church functions much like that of a family who loves and supports one another physically, emotionally, and most importantly, spiritually.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What does the concept of “family” mean to you? What obligations do family members have toward one another?

How should the church be like a family? How can it become as much a family to you as your physical family?

How well does our church reflect a healthy family in terms of its support and respect for one another? Explain.

Families come in multiple arrangements. Some have lots of children while others have no children. Some have two parents while others may be single-parent families. Some have children being raised by neither parent. Others may have blended previous families into a new, single unit. Some are multi-generational while others are just beginning. Whatever particular shape it takes, a healthy family demonstrates respect, support, and wisdom toward one another.

The Bible speaks often of how the church is to function as a family. The church is meant to be a group of born-again believers who live in right relationship with one another. Various family backgrounds, ethnicities, ages, genders, and even opposing college football fans are brought together in common love, fellowship, worship, and mission. Paul speaks to Timothy today about how he should encourage this supportive family atmosphere in the church. A healthy church lives and loves one another as a supportive, spiritual family.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 TIMOTHY 5:1-2.

1 "Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity." (ESV)

These two verses form the foundation and basis for the remainder of the chapter. While Paul wrote this letter to Timothy as a pastor, his words of wisdom apply to all of us who are part of the family of faith.

What word or phrase would you use to summarize these first two verses?

Why do you think Paul used family language (fathers, brothers, mothers, sisters) in describing how to treat people within the church?

Does respecting one another mean that we allow them to do whatever they choose? Explain.

While Paul said not to rebuke an older man, he did not mean for Timothy (or we, for that matter) to allow inappropriate behavior to continue. Instead, we are to exhort one another—as a family, we are to encourage and challenge each other to godly behavior—as we would a dear father, brother, mother, or sister.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 TIMOTHY 5:3-16.

3 "Honor widows who are truly widows. 4 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. 5 She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day, 6 but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. 7 Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach. 8 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.

9 Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, 10 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. 11 But refuse to enroll younger widows, for when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry 12 and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith. 13 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. 14 So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander. 15 For some have already strayed after Satan. 16 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." (ESV)

What would you identify as the primary principle in these verses? Does this principle apply only to ministry toward widows?

While the initial subject of these verses is that of widows, "household" (v. 8) broadens the level of responsibility to include other family members who may qualify.

Why should each person or family take responsibility to support family members?

How should we as a church apply the heart and intent behind Paul's words to Timothy? Are there other groups besides widows to whom we might have similar responsibilities?

The opening word "honor" summarizes this section of verses. Some versions refer to "recognition" or "support," both of which are appropriate—but the context makes clear that Paul had in mind financial and physical needs as well. As Paul stressed in verses 4-8, responsibility for support initially and primarily fell to physical family members. However, verse 3 leaves no doubt—if there was no family (or perhaps if there was family but it refused to step up to the need), then the church was to act to support widows. The church might do this preemptively (teaching/reinforcing children's and grandchildren's responsibility), as well as directly. A healthy family supports and cares for one another.

It is apparent from these verses (and from vv. 5-6) that Paul considered more than marital status in determining who should be afforded church support. Why would Paul set parameters for whom the church should support?

By establishing parameters, Paul also excluded some individuals from church support. According to his explanation, why did he do that?

Based on Paul's guidelines to Timothy, how would you construct a contemporary description of whom your church should support? Can a church maintain both a healthy family atmosphere and a set of parameters for financial support at the same time? Explain your answer.

In the first century, very few women would have had a legitimate means of self-support if their husbands died before their sons could provide for them. If such a widow had no father or brother to provide support, the woman (and her children, if she had any) would have fallen into a desperate situation.

Even so, Paul did not advocate universal widow support. Paul leveraged several guidelines for identifying true widows in hopes of not creating an atmosphere of church welfare as opposed to the support of those in the church who truly required assistance. Rather, he reserved that support for those who demonstrated the sincerity of their faith, both in what they did (vv. 9-11) and in what they did not do (v. 13).

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 TIMOTHY 5:17-20.

17 "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages." 19 Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. 20 As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear." (ESV)

What does verse 17 teach about the relationship between leadership and finances? Why do you think preaching and teaching are specifically mentioned?

In verses 17-18, Paul instructed Timothy on how to deal with those who were serving Christ well. Paul taught Timothy that those who lead God's churches should receive double honor, both respect and compensation (Gal. 6:6). Specifically, Paul singled out those who work hard at preaching and teaching as leaders who should receive these honors for their ministry to the believers. The elder/overseer/pastor's ministry of sharing God's truth was especially important to guard the church against heresy.

What is the meaning of verse 18 in the context of Christian ministry?

Paul supported from Scripture his directive to financially reward worthy elders. He quoted Deuteronomy 25:4, which taught the Israelites to let their cattle eat from the grain as they moved about the threshing floor. Paul reasoned that if God wanted the Israelites to show concern for a laboring ox, then certainly He wants a congregation of believers to show concern for their pastor.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

In what ways does our church or small group support those who need help?

Are there any needs in your group or among your friends that you can meet this week?

How can you or your group provide care for someone in the community this week as a means of outreach?

PRAYER

Thank God for giving each person in the group the blessing of a church family. Ask Him for discernment and grace for each person in your church. Ask the Holy Spirit to invoke within you an attitude of generosity and sacrifice for those in your church.

COMMENTARY

| 1 TIMOTHY 5:1-20

5:1 In dealing with the older men Paul urged Timothy to avoid a harsh, insensitive treatment which would not appreciate their age. The term *"rebuke"* describes a severe verbal pounding. Such treatment would show no appreciation for age. The youthful Timothy faced a ticklish situation in appealing to older men, but differences of age did not make admonition to these men any less necessary. Timothy was not to talk down to younger men, but he was to treat them as equals. The term *"exhort"* demands a kindlier, more considerate approach than the previously denounced *"rebuking."*

5:2 Paul directed Timothy to treat the older women respectfully as mothers (cf. Rom 16:13). A church leader would find it virtually impossible to heap verbal abuse on an older woman if he showed personal respect for her. Younger women posed a special problem

for Timothy. He was to treat them as sisters and maintain a purity that would banish all evil in thought and deed. The word “purity” calls for modesty and chastity in all relationships.

5:3 Paul identified two qualifications of genuine widows. First, they had no relatives to care for them (5:4, 8). Second, they practiced certain spiritual disciplines (5:5). Paul suggested caution in handling a widow whose life goal was merely pleasure (5:6), and he reminded families of their obligation to care for genuine widows (5:8).

The term “*proper recognition*” demanded that the church treat the widow with respect. It would have been natural for the church to give financial support as a result of the respect (see Acts 6:1–6). Paul would next explain how the church was to identify the truly needy widows so that they might help and honor them. 118

5:4 Paul spoke to children and grandchildren who had the means and responsibility to care for aged parents or grandparents. He stated three facts about giving financial help to needy relatives. First, such help is a sign of true piety or godliness. Second, Paul saw the giving of this care as a repayment for the earlier care that children had received. Third, care for older widows is pleasing to God (see 1 Tim 2:3 for a similar statement).

5:5 Paul described the true widow, who was really in need, with three phrases. His description outlines more precisely the kind of person whom Paul had exhorted Timothy to honor. First, she was “*left all alone.*” There were no relatives to support her, and she had no source of income or encouragement. Second, she “*puts her hope*” in God. The use of the Greek perfect tense to describe placing this hope shows that the widow had developed a settled and continuous confidence in God. Since she had no one else to care for her, she had learned to depend on God alone. Third, the widow was a woman of prayer who prayed “*night and day,*” a manner of saying that she prayed continually.

5:6 A contrast to the godly widow of v. 5 appears in Paul’s description of the merry widow. The word translated as “*lives for pleasure*” is a rare New Testament word that indicates luxurious, voluptuous indulgence (used only elsewhere in James 5:5 to describe self-indulgent living). The widow who abandons herself for pleasure and comfort is in complete contrast with the godly widow who prays and seeks God.

5:8 Paul’s purpose in this verse was to reprimand those families who neglected their own needy widows. To “*provide*” involves foreseeing and planning for the needs of dependents. The failure of Christians to care for their own loved ones is a more flagrant fault than the same trait would be in an unbeliever. Christians have Christ’s example of love to which

unbelievers lack access (John 13:34–35). Paul recommended the behavior of true widows as a desirable contrast to the actions of the frivolous younger widows (5:9–10). Paul's twin concerns in this section were to direct the younger widows into a responsible commitment to marriage and family and to direct the church to show genuine concern for true widows.

5:9 In vv. 9–10 Paul restated requirements that the true widow was to possess in order to receive help from the church. It is likely that Paul was outlining the qualifications of those widows who would be able to get personal help from the church and was not giving any official recognition to an order of widows.

5:10 Paul's third requirement was to list some of the specific good works that should characterize the life of the widow. The listed good deeds are representative but not exhaustive or completely definitive. These benevolent works do not constitute a list of requirements or duties.

5:11–13 In these verses Paul makes a specific request concerning the younger widows and then explains the reasons for his request. He did not want younger widows to be regular recipients. In vv. 11b–13 he supported the request with two reasons. First, in vv. 11b–12 he wisely indicated that younger widows would normally want to remarry. In eagerness to marry, the widows' concern might race ahead of their commitment to Christ. They could easily desire to marry more eagerly than they desired to serve Christ. The explanation for Paul's strong words apparently lay in his view of widowhood as a spiritual commitment. He did not want younger widows to accept the calling of widowhood and then renounce that call with the appearance of any eligible man. It was better to allow them to plan for remarriage as he directed in 5:14.

5:14 Younger widows were to become wives, mothers, and managers of the homes. The word for "*have children*" is from the same word family as "*childbearing*" in 2:15. Performing such a task would absorb energies which, if unused, could lead to gossiping and other meddlesome activities. Paul desired that the Ephesian Christians stand well before the outside world. Here he gives reasons for which these younger widows were not to be placed among the group of true widows. These younger widows failed to meet the requirements of vv. 9–10, and they were not eligible for aid.

5:15 The urgency of making immediate changes came because the problem with straying young widows was already upon them. Some who had pledged a commitment to widowhood were not living as the true widow of vv. 5, 9–10. They had abandoned their trust in God and had become involved in gossip, false teaching, strife, and discord within

the church (5:15). Paul did not specify the exact meaning of turning “*away to follow Satan*”—it need not mean a formal apostasy from Christianity, but it does suggest a carnal lifestyle.

5:16 Paul may have aimed a rebuke at a younger woman, either widowed or married to an unbeliever, who was neglecting the care of a widowed mother or grandmother. Second, Paul may have been thinking of a wealthy Christian woman such as Lydia (Acts 16:14–15), who could care for needy widows in her household. In both possible instances, Paul was urging the women to use their time, wealth, or both to care for the needy widows.

5:17. “Double honor” could mean they deserved twice as much pay, but this poses some difficulties: Double what he got last year? Double someone else who did not do as well? Double from the church down the road? Double what he expected? Paul probably intended that the pastor receive honor in double form: both through fair pay and through the respect and obedience of the congregation. Certainly, he was eager for the church to recognize the dignity and value of the pastor who did his job conscientiously (1 Tim. 3:1).

5:18. To give biblical credence to Paul’s claim that a pastor should be given an honorable wage, he cited two scriptural precedents representative of all the created order. The first comes from the law: do not muzzle an ox (Deut. 25:4); the second points to Jesus’ teaching: the worker deserves his wages (Luke 10:7).

5:19. Because leaders are always more open to unfair criticisms, gossip, and allegations, no accusation against a pastor or elder should be considered unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. The roots of this counsel are founded in the timeless wisdom of God, as given to ancient Israel (Deut. 19:15). It was confirmed by Jesus (Matt. 18:15–17) and Paul (see also 2 Cor. 13:1).

5:20. But there may be occasions when a church leader is found guilty of sin. If so, that leader is to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning. The rebuke is intended to produce repentance in the sinner, and to emphasize to the congregation the seriousness of sin. It is also a statement regarding the influence of a leader and how his actions affect those under his care. With the hope that restoration will occur, those who have broken congregational trust must appear before those whom they have violated.