

How to Treat the Family of God

1 Timothy 5:1-16

As we prepare to turn to 1 Timothy 5, we should start first of all in Acts 6. There is a clear connection between what we see as the first deacons are appointed at the church in Jerusalem in Acts 6 and the very practical teaching and instruction we see in 1 Timothy 5. Read Acts 6:1-7: “Now in those days when the number of disciples was multiplying there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists (Greeks) because their widows (key link to 1 Timothy 5) were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said it is not desirable that we (the apostles) should leave the Word of God and serve tables. [Not that they are too good to do that, but their primary calling is to study and preach and teach the Bible.] Therefore brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude and they chose Stephen a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip and Prochorus and Nicanor and Timon and Paramenas and Nicolaus, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles and when they had prayed they laid hands on them. [Now note] Then the Word of God spread and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.” With that as a connection look at 1 Timothy 5 and read verses 1-16. “Do not rebuke an older man but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters with all purity. Honor widows, [and I might note that the word widows will occur from verse 3-16 no less than 9 times, so the dominate instruction is how do we treat widows in the fellowship? A very practical matter in the 1st century context and perhaps something we should pay more

attention to than we do in the 21st century context.] Honor widows who are really widows. But if any widow has children or grandchildren let them first learn to show piety [godliness] at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God. Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives. And these things command, that they may be blameless. 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. 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. But, refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, [that is their sensual desires overtake them] they desire to marry, having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not. Therefore, I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. For some have already turned aside after Satan. If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve [minister] them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows."

I used to hear in church as a younger boy and then as a teenage a song entitled "The Family of God." It went something like this, "I am so glad I am a part of the family of God, I have been washed in the fountain cleansed by His blood. Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod, I am so glad I am a part of the family of God." Now, I like that song though I never did really appreciate the tune all that much. I like the song in terms of its content because it is true.

What we are as the church is a family. We are not a corporation, we are not a company. We are a family. Therefore we are to act like a family, we are to function like a family and we are to treat one another as family. What this text does is help us understand exactly how we should treat the family of God. What we are going to find here is wisdom that is clear and practical. I also think it will be convicting for many of us. In fact, note that at verse 21, you have a controlling verse that guides all of what we see in verse 1-16. There Paul writes “I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice doing nothing with partiality.” So what we are going to see in verse 1-16 is how we should we treat the family of God and how do we treat the family of God without prejudice and without partiality treating one another wisely and graciously.

I. Treat everyone respectfully.

5:1-2

There are four different categories of persons that you find in the family, 1) older men or fathers, 2) younger men, brothers, 3) older women or mothers, 4) and younger women or sisters. Paul begins by telling us that we should treat an older man as a father. Do not rebuke, do not get in the face of an older man but exhort, encourage him as a father. Coming along side of that treat a younger man as your brothers. There is tremendous pastoral wisdom especially for men that are preparing for the ministry. When I was first involved in ministry, when God called me into the ministry on a mission trip on the Papago Indian Reservation in Arizona when I was 20, I would quickly move to Dallas, TX and I would spend the next 15 years of my life there. At the age of 21, I was invited to join a particular church as a staff person and I would remain there for the next six and a half years. Then I served another church for 3 years. During all that time I was either in my 20's or my very early 30's. As I would deal with men in the church, though I was not as familiar with this passage as I should have been, intuitively God impressed upon my heart

the wisdom that is here. In other words, when I would go to a deacons meeting and I was the only one under the age of 40, I never talked in a condescending way to these men. I never talked to them like I was superior to them, smarter than them, in authority over them, even though technically based upon the Word; I was to have authority over them. But rather I would relate to them as a son would his father. In fact I can remember one time in a deacons meeting where some unhealthy things transpired and finally I said, "You know guys, I just need to tell you something. My daddy is a deacon just like you all, and in fact, my dad is about the age of most of you. I just have to say to you that if my dad were to have said some of the things I heard some of you say tonight, I would be heartbroken, so ashamed and so embarrassed that my dad would both think and act in what I see you guys doing this evening. I look to you like I look to own dad." Believe it or not, they did not scream at me, they didn't rebuke me, they didn't fire me. In fact, I think the Lord actually allowed me to say what they needed to hear because I approached them not as an equal but like a father. Of course as I got older I began to relate more to many people like a brother, although again, even to this day when I am 52, if I am dealing with someone and they are in their 70's or 80's, I still defer to them as I would defer to my dad were he still alive. Now, with my students today, it has changed. When I was at SEBTS the first time (from '92-'96), I would actually talk to most of my students with the mindset or the attitude or the disposition of the older brother. But now, almost all of the students, with rare exception at the seminary, are young enough to be my sons. So if one comes into my office with an issue or a concern or a complaint or they have done something they ought not to have done, it is often the case that I will say this before I begin: "You are about the same age as one of my sons and so I am going to talk to you in exactly the same way I would talk to one of my boys." And I will sometimes say I am going to rebuke you and tell you I am ashamed of you. I suspect that your

mom and dad raised you better than the way you are behaving. I get a little more direct, a little more confrontational because that comes with the responsibility, the maturity and the station in life of being a father. All I am saying is this, what we see in this text is Paul admonishing us to learn how to say the right things at the right time in the right way. And the right way is taking into account the age of the person that you are talking to. So, don't you rebuke, if you are younger, an older man. Encourage him like you would a dad. And if you have a younger person that is about your age or a little younger than you, then speak to them as you would a brother. Along the same lines, if there is an older woman, you don't talk to her in a condescending or arrogant or on an equal plain kind of way. No, you talk to an older woman with the same respect and dignity that you would give to the mother that you love because she is in a sense functioning as a mother in the family of God. And then to a younger sister, woman, you speak to her as a sister but note the last phrase there "with all purity." In other words, all of us in this room tonight who are of the male species must understand that we treat all of our sisters in the Lord with respect, but the younger ones we make sure we treat especially with the idea of purity in our minds and on our hearts. Again, if you are a single man, I believe this is an especially appropriate word for you. You are to treat them like a sister. Now it may be in God's grace, in God's goodness that your sister also someday becomes your wife, and that is a wonderful thing. But whether she becomes your wife or not, she is your sister and you treat a sister with respect and with a protective attitude. In fact, I very much appreciate the fact that in some churches that when men really get a handle on who they are called to be before the Lord, they will have a very protective attitude for the single sisters in the fellowship. If they see some guy come into the church and often church is a great place to prey upon pretty young women, they will step in and intervene. They will say, "Let me just tell you something. Whatever you think you are doing

with that young lady over there, let me make sure you know something. She is my sister.” In your family, if someone was messing with your sister, in Jesus name, you might knock them flat on their backside! Seriously, I like the idea of us relating to one another in this kind of way. Families take care of families. So the Bible says, treat everyone respectfully and recognize your station in life in terms of your age. Honor those above you like a father; honor those around you and beneath you as you would a brother of a sister.

II. Treat some honorably

5:3-10, 16

Paul now moves to the issue that was addressed in Acts 6. That is, what do we do with a particular group in the church that is designated here as widows, those who have lost their husband, most likely in the context, due to death. It might be in terms of principle that some allowance is made for a woman who has experienced the pain and the sorrow of a divorce later in life, who finds herself in the same kinds of situation addressed in these particular verses. I don't think Paul would have ruled that out. What we are to do with the widows? Let the natural family do what it should. Start in v. 3 and I will make comments along the way. “Honor” is in the present tense, you “continually honor widows who are really widows. Paul by the phrase “really widows” means those that have no one. There is no one around to care for them, love them, and provide for them. How do you know that? Because of what he says in verse 4. You want to act in a godly, Christ honoring way in terms of your family, if you have a mother or a grandmother that is in need, then you step in and do what God has called you to do. You repay them for this is good and acceptable before God. In other words, we don't just wash our hands and say I am not responsible. You may not be responsible legally, but the Bible says you and I are responsible spiritually. We have the first responsibility. We are the first line of provision; stepping in and caring, loving and meeting the needs of our parents, our grandparents. In fact, he

says in verse 5, “Now, she who is really a widow.” What do you mean by that Paul? Left alone. There are no children, no grandchildren. I think verse 8 is even going to suggest that there is no extended family. There is no one there for her. Well what does she do if she is left alone? Well, what we all do, but what she especially does, 1) she trusts in God, 2) she continues in supplications pleading for the Lord’s provision and supply and prayers night and day. In other words, here is a widowed woman who is a prayer warrior who has thrown her whole life upon God to step in and meet her needs lest she die. By the way, in that particular culture, nothing was more tragic than that you would be a single woman with no male in your life. And even more so if you were an older woman because the prospects for marriage are next to zero. So here is someone who can only depend upon God and the family of God. So if she is really a widow, then the Bible says we are to step in and repay her just like she was our own mother. We live in a context where in our country there are avenues of provision made possible through the government. And certainly that is to be taken advantage of because we are people, men and women under authority. Unless you are not fulfilling your duty concerning taxes, those taxes can be used to assist those who find themselves in these kinds of situations. So, look to what we can glean rightly from the government. Yes, but if the government does not provide all that this person needs to meet their basic necessities of life, then the next line of support to come in and assist is to be the body of Christ, the local church. So, she is alone, she is really a widow, she is trusting in God and in the family of God.

Now in contrast, if she lives in pleasure, lives in indulgence, if she is the type of person who does not walk in a way that is honoring to God, she is dead even while she lives. Beside verse 6, write Ephesians 2:1-3, which speaks of us being dead in our trespasses and sins. We are walking about in a physical body, but spiritually speaking we are dead, lost, cut off from the saving grace

of Christ. So what Paul is doing is drawing a stark contrast demonstrating all the more reason why we should care for this lady. She is not living indulgently, she is not living in a worldly way, and she is not living in a way that dishonors God that ignores God. She is not cut off from God. She is a godly prayer warrior and rightly can expect the assistance, aid, love, and care of her brothers and sisters in Christ. That is why Paul says in verse 7, “these things command that they may be blameless,” that we in our provision for them may act in a way with integrity, honor, above reproach and bring no scorn or shame upon the body of Christ because the world takes better care of theirs than we do ours. That is his point. Shame on any church that does not step in and meet the real, genuine, legitimate needs of these he describes as widows indeed. In fact, he says in verse 8, “If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household.” Now I take that to at least imply that we are as the extended biological family to have concern, as well as for folks who fall in these categories. In other words, if you have an aunt that is a godly woman that meets the criteria that he is going to expand on even more in verses 9ff, that is a godly woman that does not have children or grandchildren, get busy! The only family she’s got is you. Do I think that Paul is saying that you, I, we are responsible for stepping and ministering and providing for them? I certainly do. In fact, he says if you don’t provide for those of your own, and especially for those of your household; your parents, your grandparents, 1) you have denied the faith and 2) you are worse than, as the *KJV* used to say, “Worse than an infidel.” The *NKJV* cleans it up just a bit and it says you are “worse than an unbeliever.” The *ESV* says it in exactly the same way. Note verse 16: “if a believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, let them give aid to them and do not let the church be burdened that they may relieve those who are really widows.” So, we are to 1) let the natural family do what it should. 2) Let the spiritual family do what it should. Now note in v. 9 and 10.

“Do not let a widow under 60 years old be taken into the number. “Not unless she, . . . and then there is a list of things to note. Evidently they kept a list, they kept a tally, and if you were a widow and you had no children, grandchildren or extended family to provide for you, you came to the church and said I need help. I need to be put on the list of those who will have the church provide and meet the basic needs of life that I have. So, Paul said, let’s be practical. First, they cannot be under 60. I do agree with one commentator who said I doubt Paul would have ruled out a 59 year old widow woman that had no kids, grandkids and had done all these other things we see in verse 9. I don’t think he is saying 59, 364 days; you ain’t getting on the list! I think that what he is saying, using a general number, is that the older women can be considered, the younger women are not to be considered. But what kind of older women should the church consider taking care of? Well, he begins by saying she has to have the reputation and the track record of being the wife of one man, the same kind of requirement that you have for an elder in 1 Timothy 3. He must be the husband of one wife. Literally, a one woman kind of man, here a one man kind of woman. She has to have a track record that she has been a faithful, loving wife. She must also be well reported for good works. Now he brackets in verse 10 a number of things because you note that the first phrase of verse 10 is “good works” and the last phrase of verse 10 is “good works” so in essence, he sandwiches in between the “good works” statement these things: 1) she has brought up children, so she has been a faithful mother, 2) she has lodged strangers, she has been a generous and gracious host to those that needed a place to stay as they were traveling about. Also, in that context she has washed the feet of the saints, which has really the idea of total hospitality. That is, not only did she put them up, but she fed them, she washed their feet, she washed their clothes, she took care of them in terms of their total necessities and did so with great hospitality. 3) She has relieved the afflicted. In other words, she is a merciful

lady. When there are those who have been hurting, she did what she could do which is now why we should repay her in the same kind of way. In other words, what she did for others in terms of ministries of mercy, we now should likewise turn back and repay her as well. Therefore if she has diligently followed every good work in all these things that he has just listed, then she should be put on the list. So we let the spiritual family do what it should. First of all, take note of a widow's condition. Secondly, take note of a widow's conduct. We treat these older women honorably, but we treat wisely these other women.

III. Treat Others Wisely.

5:11-15

Basically, the instruction again is so practical. He says, 1) know when to say no, 2) know what they should do. What is it we should say no to? Verse 11, "but refuse to enroll the younger widows." In other words, younger widows should not be on the list. "Why not?" First of all, "when they have begun to grow wanton..." Now that is a phrase that I didn't have the slightest idea what it meant in English so I looked it up in the Greek. I like the *ESV*. Refuse to enroll younger women for "when their passions draw them away from Christ" (*ESV*). That is what it means in verse 11, that they "grow wanton against Christ." Their passions, their normal natural sensual desires and drive begins to draw them away from Christ. Alright, then what do they do? They desire to marry. Now marrying is not a bad thing. They desire to marry, and they receive condemnation because they have cast off their first faith, the marginal reading of the *NKJ* says "they have cast off their solemn promise." What is he saying? Two options. Some people believe that the best explanation is these younger widows come to the church and they say put me on the list. I will be a widow for the rest of my life. I am never going to marry, and therefore I am going to give myself, like Anna back in the temple in Luke, I am going to give myself to the Lord full time in total consecration, I will serve Him with all that I am. He in essence will be my

bridegroom and therefore I will serve Christ and Christ only. I will take a vow to maintain this commitment. There is nothing about monasticism, nothing here about a convent. There is nothing like that. The text is simply saying I am going to pursue a celibate, single lifestyle and therefore I need the assistance of the church. And what Paul says is that may be good and fine but if they are like most normal human beings they in their loneliness will want company. And being a normal woman they will want the company of a male, especially if they are young. So, they have made this commitment to Christ, but as time goes on they will become interested and in essence they will deny the pledge that they made and they will go back on their word and in essence they should never have put them on the list to begin with. That is one understanding. That is actually the most popular understanding.

The other understanding is part of that explanation. I am going to stay single, I am never going to marry, I am going to serve Christ wholly, fully, exclusively. Like 1 Corinthians 7, I am going to serve Him in that kind of single dedicated sort of way. But, again they are normal. They begin to have longings and urges both for perhaps intimacy as well as children. In fact they become so desperate that “they incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith.” Some understand that to mean they actually go out and marry a non-believer. They become so desperate for marriage that even an unbeliever may be able to seduce them, prey upon them, and draw them away from their commitment. I have seen this unfortunately happen in many churches with young women in all kinds of situations. Young men have this incredible inability to do what they ought to do. Step up to the plate, find you a woman, get married, and quit fooling around. So, find you a good woman, pursue her, and quit messing around playing video games in your underwear and t-shirts. Go do something that really matters like get married and have a bunch of kids all for the glory of Jesus.

Paul says unless you are exceptional, 1 Corinthians 7, gift of celibacy, God made you for marriage. And here is what I will say about these women. They don't need to go on the list because they won't keep their vow. Furthermore, they may even marry an unbeliever out of frustration. Furthermore, in verse 13 they learn to be idle, that is they are not accomplishing anything profitable for society or the kingdom. In fact, they have to do something, so what do they do? They wander from house to house. What do they do? Not only are they idle, they gossip, busybodies saying things they ought not to say. Well Paul, how do you prevent young women who are not married from being gossips, busybodies, and idle? Verse 14, tells you exactly how you do it. You get the young women to marry. Of course for a young woman to marry means she has to have a young man or at least a man for her to marry as well. So I want them to 1) marry, 2) bear children, 3) manage their house, and if they will do all that they will be given no opportunity to speak reproachfully as some who have already turned aside after Satan. Now isn't that amazing advice? Nothing theologically profound, nothing doctrinally sophisticated. He just simply says you want to live in a way that will bring honor to Jesus, the Jesus you claim to follow as your Lord, then get married, have kids, and take care of your house. And again, in the culture in which we live, if you do that you will become more and more something people view as odd, strange, and bizarre. However, such a lifestyle gives us the chance to model before a cynical, skeptical dying world the grace of God and the glory of God and the gift of children in a marriage that Ephesians 5 teaches us to be a beautiful reflection of the relationship of Jesus and His church, a church that He shed His blood for. Therefore what Paul says here may be very practical, but at the same time there is beautiful theological truth laid as the foundation for us to treat well each and every member of the family of God.