

## I TIMOTHY 5:1-8

### INTRODUCTION

The church is described in many ways within the Bible, but perhaps the best name that could be used to describe the church is the family of God. We are one family united together through faith in Jesus Christ and in the family of God there are people of both sexes and all ages, therefore each person must be treated like a family member that includes caring for the elderly as well as providing for the youth and children of the church.

Now like all family relationships the key to a peaceful and co-operative family is how we relate to one another. This is the theme of this section in 1 Timothy. How we relate to one another is important and so Paul is going to give advice on how to relate to widows within the church. Who is responsible to care for them and so on. But before he does so; he gives sound and strong advice on how young Timothy is to handle the various age groups and sexes within the church.

### 1. HOW TO HANDLE PEOPLE - THE KEY IS FAMILY LOVE (vs.1-2)

Paul is basically acting, as a Pastor in the church at Ephesus and therefore that will lead him into confrontational situations. There will be times when he has to rebuke people because of their beliefs, behaviour or attitudes. The key to handling each confrontational situation is love and respect for others. When he deals with the older men in the church he is not to deal with them in a harsh way (the word 'harshly' is related to the word 'violent' Timothy was not to be violent with his tongue), but he is to deal with them as a son would deal with his Father and therefore exhortation is more appropriate. The idea behind the word 'exhortation' is one of coming alongside in order to encourage or appeal to them.

But the key is to love the older men like your own Father, and deal with them with the respect due to them. It's the same with the older women of the church, love them like your Mother, and treat them accordingly with great respect and care. Of course you are not to overlook their sin but you are to be careful in how you handle their sin, do so with great love and respect.

When it comes to the younger men and women of the church we are to treat them as brothers and sisters and therefore how you rebuke them will be the way we rebuke our own blood brothers and sisters. When it comes to the women there is an extra guideline that is to treat them with absolute purity; there must be no cause for an accusation that we have acted improperly.

No suggestion that we have had impure motives towards them and no hint that we have had impure thoughts about them.

The lesson for the church is this. Most problems in churches are not caused by any great doctrinal disagreements they are simply caused by relationship problems. These relationship problems are often caused by thoughtlessness, lack of tact or lack of respect and sadly sometimes rudeness. Perhaps we all need to heed this lesson and learn to treat one another with respect, courtesy and genuine love.

If we do that; then others will be able to accept our rebukes a little easier than they would have if we treat one another harshly or disrespectfully.

### 2. HOW TO HANDLE WIDOWS WITHIN THE CHURCH - FULFILLING OUR OBLIGATIONS TO THEM

Now Paul comes to the problem of widows in the church. In the first century there was no social security like the one that we have here in Britain. There was no state help to those who were in real and genuine need. So within the church there would be a group of widows who needed help

and care. It is possible that this group of people would be a sizeable number. What is the church to do with them? How can the church help?

Well again the church is told to pay them proper respect, to show them family love Paul says that we are to give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need (v 3). Let us first of all establish what Paul means by widow. The Greek word includes our English meaning of the word (a woman whose husband is dead) but the Greek word is not as limited as the English word. The word in Greek means 'bereft' 'robbed' 'having suffered loss' or 'left alone.' The word is broad enough to include those who have lost their husbands through death, desertion divorce or imprisonment.

Therefore the responsibility of the church is to those who have lost their husbands through one means or another. The church is a family and therefore who is it that supports someone when they have lost a loved one, it's the family of course. The word translated 'recognition' is a word that means to show respect, care, and support and includes meeting all types of need including financial ones.

**A) Which Widows Should The Church Care For?** Every church will have limited resources, therefore every church must be a good steward of its resources. The church is not to help every widow but only those who are really in need, only those who have no one else to care for them (v 3) There is a criteria that the church must use in deciding who to support –

**i) Those Without Family Support** (vs. 4, 8 & 16) It is the responsibility of Christian children and Grandchildren to look after their elderly parents or Grandparents and by extension their elderly relatives. It is not the church's responsibility to look after your parents Christian; it is yours. Paul goes on and says that there is no point saying I am a Christian if you do not practise your faith in this very practical area of caring for your parents, or relatives (v 4). This is an area where Christians can be a witness today. We live in an individualistic society and one of the results is that some elderly parents do feel uncared for.

O they may be cared for physically in a care home but some do feel unloved, as they don't see as much of their family as they need. There are all sorts of reasons for this and the work pattern in our society doesn't help, but the Christian should be someone who cares not just for our elderly relatives' physical needs but for their emotional and psychological needs as well.

However let me also give a little warning to those who may be elderly and are getting good support from your family but are not content with it. Families always have to strike a balance, a husband's first priority is to his wife and vice visa, not to elderly parents, and therefore we all need to help our families to strike a balance between caring for elderly parents and caring for their own family.

Some older people are never happy unless they have their children's undivided attention on demand, but that is not possible and therefore a balance has to be struck so that Christian families can care for their elderly relatives; but that their elderly relatives do not put excessive demands upon the carer so that their family suffers as a result. The balance is a difficult one but it must be struck and maintained.

**a) The Reasons Why Christians are To Fulfil Their Obligations To their Parents**

**i) Repay their Parents (v 4).** Parents make many sacrifices in order to bring up their family. They did without themselves in order that their family could have certain things. They showed unconditional love, and they made many sacrifices so that their children could develop and become mature adults. Therefore when elderly parents need us, we ought to do the same for

them, we ought to be willing to pay the same price and see it as a sort of repayment of all that we owe them. We could never repay all that they did for us but we can at least make a start.

**ii) It Pleases God (v 4)** – Another reason why Christians ought to take on the care for their elderly relatives is that it pleases God. It is obedience to him it is obeying the fifth commandment and it is bringing honour and glory to his name. So we do not care for our elderly relatives just for their sakes, we do it for God's sake.

**iii) Failure To Do So Is A Denial Of The Faith (v 8)** Paul says that even pagans have a sense of obligation to elderly relatives therefore if any Christian fails to fulfil their obligations then they are actually worse than the unbelieving pagans and have denied the faith. Paul is thinking about practice here not someone's standing before God. If we say we belong to God then our practice ought to show it. That involves looking after elderly relatives for in Paul's culture even the most hardened pagan knew that they had responsibilities in this area.

**iv) It Relieves The Church (v 16)** Another reason for fulfilling our family obligations is so that the church will not be burdened with helping them. You see if their own family will not help a widow, then that person would be put into the class of a widow in need, someone who has been bereft of all other help. Therefore the church would need to help such a person and of course that then takes resources that could be used for those widows who are truly in need.

So the principle is clear and the application I trust is clear, we are responsible for looking after our elderly family relatives. Failure to do so, fails to repay our Parents for their care of us, it denies the faith that we proclaim, it displeases God and it eases the burden on the church that has a responsibility towards widows who are truly in need.

**ii) Godly Widows** – But what happens to those widows who have no family to care for them, should the church not care for them? Well the answer is yes but only if they meet the certain criteria. This criteria is listed for us:

**a) Consistent Christian** – The church does not have the same obligation to widows who are not Christians than they do to those who are Christians, They have an obligation but their obligation is based on doing good to all people (Galatians 6:10). But the church has a rock solid obligation to a widow who is putting her hope in God and daily comes before him and seeks His help in meeting her needs (v 5).

Such a widow will live for God and not self-seeking and self-satisfying pleasures (v 6). In other words the church has an obligation to help meet the needs of widows who are in need, have no one else to support them and are people who live a consistent Christian life.

Let me conclude by applying this. Although in our western culture we can be very thankful for the system that we have for helping those in genuine need. We ought to thank God that we live in a land that at least does something to meet those needs. However if we take the word 'widow' in its widest possible meaning then it is likely that most churches will have some people in this category. For example there may be divorcees who have been totally denied family support as a result of the divorce and are only just surviving on the help that they receive from the Government. Yes they might struggle financially but there are other needs, like raising children, having stimulating adult company and a host of other things that perhaps the church could provide. Then there are Bachelors and Spinsters who have no family members to care for them in their old age. The help they need may not be physical or financial but loneliness is a very real problem for such people. Can the church do something to meet that need?

I hope you can see the applications for yourself; there are a host of them if we only just ponder them. Paul's clear point is that the church is a family; its members are to treat one another with

love, care courtesy and respect. But we are also to show that family love by caring for those in need. Much of such caring will go on in a very informal way and most of us will not know about it. But the church in general should also be willing when necessary to help in financial and other practical ways so that we can show our love for one another in very practical ways.

Let's pray!