

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IS LIKE A FAMILY

1 Timothy 5:1-25

Key Verse: 5:8

"If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

In chapter 5 we learn general instructions to Christians who are living in the world. Because of sin we are living separately. Because of sin we are unintentionally selfish and indifferent. But this chapter teaches us that we have to be mindful even of sorrowful widows. At that time, divorced widows were numerous due to the male dominant trend of the world. In chapter 5 we learn that Christians are all brothers and sisters. They are mindful of one of the root problems of society, that was, helpless widows. No one is useless. Everybody is useful to God. Let's learn what Paul has to say.

I. Ethical relationships of a Christian community (1-8)

First, mutual respect (1-3). Look at verse 1. "Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers...." As we know well, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ changed people's hearts. There were no ethical or moral standards at that time. Even if people had them, they were chaotic. In verse 1 we learn two things. Firstly, we must have a basic respect for an older man as our father. And we must also treat younger men with respect. It sounds very plain. But in the ancient time, old men were regarded as old men who were useless because they lost their labor power. On the other hand, in the ancient time older men treated younger men as ignorant with no experience. Here, "treat younger men as brothers," is a truly revolutionary declaration. When the young men saw young women, they did not see them as their own sisters. They saw them as the objects of pleasure. When Christians think of young women as their own sisters, young men will not ruin young women, because they will think, "they are my sisters." There was a young minister. He ministered to his church very well. But when he saw young women, he did not see his own sisters, but he

saw them as young women. One day he went up on a mountain and began to pray to solve this problem. He heard God's word, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (Jn 10:11). Then he realized that he is a father to young men, especially to young women, and his church members are all his sons and daughters. These days many young men see young women as young women. As a result, they make many mistakes. But we must see young women as our precious sisters. This part reminds us of the Lord's prayer, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name..." (Mt 6:9).

Paul wrote verses 1 and 2 in order to talk about widows. Look at verse 3. "Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need." In Paul's times widows were regarded as burdensome people. So many widows came into the churches as their shelter. The church leaders did not know how to deal with them. Since the gospel of Jesus Christ was not fully preached and rooted, the moral and ethical standards were very low. But the church is a Christian community like a family. So they had to deal with the widows. Look at verse 3. "Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need." This one verse is really an epoch-making event. Widows are generally

hopeless and they had no husbands. So they were known as burdensome and annoying people. But Paul says, "Give proper recognition..." Paul's saying was unacceptable and intolerable to the people of the times.

In the oriental countries women and especially widows were regarded as pitiful people. In a family, men acted as if they were masters and women slaves. Widows were servants or slaves belonging to the unemployment agency. In China there were high-class people, middle-class people, ordinary-class people and servant-class people and slave-class people and permanent-slave-class people. The gospel of Jesus came into China in the seventeenth century. Many heard the gospel, that in God everybody is equal. These oppressed people accepted Jesus as their Savior simply because the Bible says, "All people are equal, including women." When they accepted Christ, they received baptism. They were happy to die because they believed that they are equal with others. They thought that they suffer much and die. But they have eternal life in Jesus Christ.

Second, a widow's privilege and responsibility (4-7). Widows should raise

children and grandchildren. How do they raise their children and grandchildren when they are bitter? They must overcome their bitterness and assume the responsibility as grandmothers before God (3,4). Still, widows are mostly despised, not cared for. But Paul says these widows must put their hope in God, and learn how to pray, not put their hope in a second husband or someone they could depend on. Look at verse 5. "The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help." In the Bible, widows and orphans are known as the most pitiful people. Christianity is the religion of God's deep grace. Therefore, these most pitiful people must be a good influence to their children or their grandchildren. In the time of desperation, they must put their hope in God and continue to pray day and night. Look at verse 5. "The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help." This part reminds us of Anna, the daughter of Phanuel. She was very old. She had lived with her husband seven years after marriage and then was a widow until she was 84. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying (Lk 2:36-38). Widows can be good mothers and grandmothers who raise their children as

godly people.

A widow's role is very important. "But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives" (6). At that time widows' human conditions were pitiful. But because of their human conditions they are not sorrowful people. Rather, through their hard human conditions they can glorify God by raising children as godly people and by praying for growing children and for themselves and for the nation, like Anna. But the widow who lives for pleasure is useless. Look at verse 7. "Give the people these instructions, too, so that no one may be open to blame." We must pray that grandmothers or widows may be prayer servants for the growing generation.

Third, Christians are one family (8). Look at verse 8. "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." This verse sounds as if a Christian man must be very faithful to his own family, even if it is an ungodly family. But family in God is different from worldly family. Jesus said in Mark 3:35, "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." On the basis of Jesus' saying, our family is founded on the word of God. Our family is

founded on the precious promises of God. From Paul's point of view, a family means the church. We are all brothers and sisters who are baptized by the blood of Jesus Christ (Ro 6:5). There is still the physical bond of the family. They think that father and mother and their children are one family. And their grandfather who is in the nursing home is part of their family. Nevertheless, human bonds are temporal and each person must go in their own way until they arrive in the heavenly kingdom. Each person must stand before the judgment seat of God to know where his or her final destination is (2Co 5:10). Soon after we will see that our beloved ones are there. Soon after we will see some of our beloved ones are not there because they had no promise of God in their hearts. When we superficially read verse 8, it seems to be that one must take care of his family first and next his relatives and neighbors. But when Paul said, "to provide for his relatives or immediate family," he meant that the family members are those whose names are in the book of life.

Christian family members cannot be indifferent to one another. They must carefully observe other members' needs, especially spiritual needs, and feed them both physically and spiritually. This is the Christian community.

This is the house church. This is the earthly tent for the holy pilgrims and those family members have one Father in heaven. If we neglect our brethren's needs, we are worse than non-Christians.

II. The art of rebuking (9-25)

First, don't ordain a widow until she is 60 years old (9-10). If a widow had been faithful to her husband and was well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children and showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds, she deserves great admiration. She also deserves ordination as an overseer. In fact, not all the church members recognized that women be ordained as elders. But Paul, in the truth of God, ordained faithful women as elders of the church. He is not bound by the law. He is a man of freedom in the grace of God. But he warns that younger widows cannot be ordained. If a younger widow becomes proud and useless it had been better for her not to be ordained until she is 60 years old. Paul knew that man is basically good and evil. So Paul nailed down a command that a woman should not be ordained until she is 60 years old.

Second, young widows should not become idlers or gossips (11-16). As we know well, and history attests, widows are known as lonely people. As we know well, there is a prison in order to imprison criminals. It is to punish the person by isolating him from others. In short, he suffers from loneliness. There are many kinds of sufferings, but loneliness is the most painful suffering. Ninety percent of mental patients became mental patients because of their loneliness.

In order to solve the widows' problem of being idlers and gossips, Paul suggests a solution. Look at verse 14. "So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander." The devil cannot miss the opportunity of devouring widows. So Paul advised Timothy to allow younger widows to get married so that they might have children and as a result become very busy to take care of children. But it is the last resort to allow the younger widows to marry because their marriage brings judgment on themselves, "because they have broken their first pledge" (12). When they married first, they vowed to God that they would not

separate except for death. There was a beautiful Moabite woman. But she became a young widow. She was not a widow because she had the pledge in her heart at the time of holy matrimony. She said, "May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me" (Ru 1:17b). So Paul admonishes Christians to take care of those widows who were living in other Christian families (16).

Third, elders are worthy of double honor (17-19). Look at verse 17. "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching." Why do they deserve double honor? Because they devote themselves to preaching and teaching. In other words, Christians must learn how to see with respect those who devote themselves to the ministry of the word. At that time there were so many who were coming to study the Bible (Ac 28:23). Those Bible teachers did not have to support themselves. So Paul says they deserve support (Deut 25:4; Lk 10:7).

Fourth, obvious sinners and hidden sinners (20-25). Paul says that those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that others may take warning (20). It should be done fairly (21). Many who were ambitious to be ordained worked diligently to be recognized as good leaders. Paul says in verse 22, "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure." A Christian leader must have spiritual insight to see a man's inner motive, whether he works for God from the heart or to satisfy his selfish ambition.

Look at verse 23. "Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses." Drunkards cannot be church leaders because they will be drunken by the wine. Paul encourages Timothy not to drink to be drunk, but to drink a little if necessary for the healing of his upset stomach. Those who have spiritual insight can see those whose sins are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them. And the sin of others trails behind them (24). In the same way, there are those whose good deeds are obvious and even those that are not cannot be hidden, even if they want to do good deeds secretly. There are obvious sinners and there are secret sinners. Here Paul implies that the obvious sinners should be cast out.

We are living in the last part of the 20th century. Individualism and privacy are considered as the way to human happiness. When we study this passage we learn that Christians cannot be selfish or indifferent. Christians must think that those who believe in the word of God are all brothers and sisters in the kingdom of God at the present and for the future.