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.