

1 Timothy 5:1-6:5
Relationships: Elders, Widows, Slaves, Masters

The early church did its best to live as a kind of extended family. In Paul's letters we find in various places the, and to care for one another. this doesn't mean only thinking kind thoughts and saying comforting words. It means providing material and financial help for those in need.

What was your family life like when you were growing up?

1. Read 1 Timothy 5: 1-16. There are several kinds of relationships covered in this passage. What guidelines are given about healthy family living within the church?

The reason that Paul is concerned about the church caring for others is directly an intimately related to his whole view of God, Jesus, the church, and the world. It grows immediately out of his most central theological concerns. The church is the renewed family of God, in the Messiah and in the power of the spirit; And its family life must reflect that fact. Just because those of us in the modern West live in small family units with (for most of us) rather little contact with our fellow Christians, certainly by comparison with the early church, that shouldn't blind us to the reality of the extended Christian family that Paul was dealing with.

Christian theology, then, is closely bound up with guidelines for healthy family living.

2. What problems might creep in when these guidelines are not followed?
3. How can we balance the family life of all God's people with our responsibilities in our own families?

In 5:3-16, Paul speaks specifically about care of widows. In a world without any form of state organized social welfare, the church from the very beginning took upon itself the task of caring for those with nobody to look after them and no means of supporting themselves. This meant, in particular, widows. In the ancient world, women whose husbands had died often faced total destitution. Often, when someone became a Christian, their own family would disown them, so that any support from relatives would be cut off. The church faced the task of living as an alternative family and had to come to terms with the resulting tensions and difficulties, as well as the possibilities of joyful shared life and mutual support, especially in the context of likely having quite limited

resources. This is why in this passage Paul goes into considerable detail on the rules for enrolling and supporting widows.

4. What problems is Paul trying to avoid by going into such detail on how to care for widows?
5. How do these instructions relate to situations we face in our own day?
6. 5:17 Why might Paul say an accusation against a pastor should be supported by two witnesses?
7. Why must a pastor avoid favoritism at all costs?
8. What problems might occur from prematurely calling someone to ministry?

Supposing the world goes on for another 1000 years, and the Christians alive at that time look back at our generation, what would shock them the most? Some might highlight how white Christians went along with the oppression of their black brothers and sisters; others would focus on the massive problem of debt in the developing world. Some would declare that Western Christianity has lost the plot entirely when it comes to sexual morality. It could be our thoughtless use of oil-based products as a major energy source.

As we look back at the 1st century and ask, “Why did they seem to tolerate that?” one of the biggest things that worries us about them would be their acceptance of slavery. Because all we can say about slavery is that it is wrong, we cannot believe that the early Christians did not have the same reaction.

The answer, of course, is that many of them did. But in Paul's day slaves formed up to 1/3 of the population. Most free families except the very poor owned at least one or two. Declaring grandly that you were opposed to the whole system would achieve about as much as someone today standing up in church and announcing that they were opposed to the use of oil-based products and therefore regarded cars, planes, and motor boats as unchristian. What the early Christians did, with Paul as their head, was to declare that masters and slaves were in fact equal before God (Galatians 3:2) and to treat both alike as possessing individual responsibility before God.

9. In 6:1-2 what attitude does Paul tell the slaves to have towards their Masters? Why?

10. Where do you need to grow in respecting others who may not be seen by the world as your "equals" socially or economically?

11. What happens in Christian communities where the guidelines in this passage for community living are not followed?