

# THE CHURCH AS GOD'S FAMILY

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*By the Book™* A Chapter by  
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## Let's Begin

*Someone rightly said, "if you are born once, you are born into the devil's family; if you are born twice, you are born into God's family." The Bible makes it clear that all those who receive Christ as Lord and Savior, are members of God's family, born "children of God" (John 1:12). Nor is this just an invisible family into which we are born. Instead there is a visible, physical expression of God's spiritual family. We know this expression as the church, the body of Christ.*

*Paul's letters to Timothy represent specific instructions on the organization, structure, officers, and leaders within the church, the physical family of God on earth. Chapter five specifically deals with a broad range of family members, "fathers," and "brothers" as well as "widows" and "elders."*

*As we begin our study of chapter five, let's follow the outline below:*

- I. First, Paul Explains the Composition of God's Family (vv. 1-2)**
- II. Second, Paul Explains the Compassion within God's Family (vv. 3-16)**
- III. Third, Paul Explains the Custody over God's Family (vv. 17-25)**

## I. First, Paul Explains the Composition of God's Family (vv. 1-2)

The church is made up of people. This sounds so simple but too often the wrong idea assumed is, the church is the building in which we meet. Furthermore, not only is the church made up of people, the church is made up of people who are spiritually connected together, an eternal connection which can never be broken. We are the body of Christ. We are the family of God!

Paul makes the family image clear at the beginning of the chapter. He writes, "Rebuke not an elder, but intreat *him* as a father; *and* the younger men as brethren; The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity" (vv. 1-2). Note he speaks of "father," "brethren," "mothers," and "sisters." When a person joins Jesus, he or she joins a family!

Consequently, there is no room in the church for believers to give other spiritual members of the family a hard time. Paul says we should treat "elders" as our spiritual fathers in Christ. Observe that Paul is not referring to "elder" in the sense of a bishop (3:1-2). Instead he is referring to an aged, maturing believer. And, our treatment of them should be to not "rebuke" them any more than we would rebuke our biological father. We must not speak roughly or act impatiently with them. They deserve our utmost respect and dignity. How sad some churches treat their elderly members with such uncomely manners. The music they enjoy is sometimes ridiculed, and their ideas are summarily dismissed as merely "traditional." Is this not "rebuking" the elderly, a practice which Paul cautioned us to avoid?

In fact, according to Paul, there is no real generational gap in the church Jesus builds. The young need the elderly just as the elderly need the young. Men do not look upon women like lustful objects as does the world. Instead men treat women as sisters of the family of God. Women respect men. Older women are our mothers and younger men our brothers. The family of God is one. The composition is united as the body of Christ.

### Reflection Connection

*Is it your practice to treat other believers as family? Explain.*



## II. Second, Paul Explains the Compassion within God's Family (vv. 3-16)

God's family is special. Thus it is to be filled with special compassion expressed for God's people. Paul especially notes a particular group in God's family which has unique needs. He writes, "Honour widows that are widows indeed... Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day... If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed" (vv. 3, 5, 16). Widows were singled out by the Apostle to represent the church's specific obligation to minister to all its members, including those the world abuses and ignores.

Observe the close attention Paul pays as he profiles the widow community within the ancient church. First, some widows need their *physical families* to bear much of ministry burden. If a widow has a family, they have the responsibility. This is only natural, for while the church is called to minister to people's needs, families are to care for their respective members. And, just what is required of the family? The family should *repay them*, "But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God" (v. 4). "Piety" is expressed "at home" the Apostle makes clear. Home is where all believers begin to live for Jesus (cp. Mark 5:19).

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In addition, the family should *refresh them*. Again Paul writes, "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (v. 8). Only infidels are worse than those believers who refuse to care for their needy family members. If we do not attempt to offer provision, we are living worse than unbelievers. Finally, the family is required to *relieve them* (v. 16). Practical implications of the Christian faith begin in the home. For Paul, it was clearly expressed by caring and compassion for widows.

Second, some widows need their *spiritual families* to bear the ministry burden. Paul speaks of the true widow as being "desolate" (v. 5). She is left totally alone. Her husband has left her through death. Of course, her ultimate help comes from the Lord in whom she "trusts." She sets her hope high in Jesus Christ. He is her comfort and her peace. He sustains her and encourages her to go on alone. On the other hand, however, she requires some immediate help.

In a lengthy paragraph (vv. 9-15), Paul speaks of "the number." He writes in part, "Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she



### Reflection Connection

*Does your church have an organized ministry program to widows? Explain.*

have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work” (vv. 9-10). Older widows are to be received who have met particular qualifications.

Yet younger widows are to be rejected, “But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry” (v. 11). Not mature in their commitment to remain single, Paul cautions Timothy to encourage younger women to wait until they are spiritually strong enough to keep the vows they must offer as a widow.

### III. Third, Paul Explains the Custody over God’s Family (vv. 17-25)

God’s family on earth is gifted by those whom the Lord anoints as custodians of his family. The custodians—those who oversee God’s church—are generally called pastors. At the beginning of the chapter, Paul mentioned “elders.” However, he was referring not to church leaders in particular but only to mature, aged men within the church. And, while the “elders” were to receive a measure of respect, pastors who serve God’s church, overseeing His ministry are to receive special recognition and authority within the church.

First, *financial* matters need to be considered. The main point here is *honor*. Paul writes, “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward” (vv. 17-18). Paul employs the term, “rule well.” The idea concerns one who presides. God appoints men in places of oversight in the church. He is referring to those who do a great job in ministry.

In addition, Paul specifically names the type of service they render, “labor in the word and doctrine.” The most important work the pastor can accomplish is faithfully preaching the Word of God. And, to those who faithfully carry out the task, “double honor” is to be given (v. 18). They receive generous financial support. Of course, Paul is not suggesting the pastor is to be the highest paid person in the community. However, he should be able to meet the needs of his family (whatever the size) and live comfortably.

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Pastors are supported in proportion to their usefulness in ministry, especially as preachers of God’s Word.

Secondly, Paul considers *spiritual* matters. Whereas before, Paul focused on *honor*, he now focuses on *holiness*. He writes, “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear. I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ,



and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality. Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure" (vv. 19-22).

The Bible is very specific pertaining to discipline extended to church members. The body of Christ cannot take sin lightly. Nor are there exceptions for church leaders. In fact, because there exist many prerequisites for church leadership (3:1ff), accountability runs high. Also, because of the public position a leader possesses and the potential damage to the church false accusations can accomplish, Paul placed high standards upon those who would bring charges against church leaders. Paul's two-fold purpose maintained Christ's honor and protected the church's testimony while it sought to restore the leader if they concluded he had sinned.

The apostolic process began with the *accusation* (v. 19). Spiritual leaders needed protection since they were vulnerable to demonic attacks. There will always exist those who seek to discredit and destroy effective Gospel preachers. Someone rightly said a lie gets half way around the world before the truth gets its shoes on. Hence the Apostle counseled Timothy to demand two to three witnesses to validate a charge. Next, the process would deal with *confrontation* (v. 20). When the facts are known, the determination is made whether or not the church leader sinned. The object was to bring the "fallen" leader to repentance and restoration (cp. Gal. 6:1).

Finally, the process culminates with *determination* (vv. 21-22). When a church leader is charged with a moral crime, it is not to be taken lightly. And, if the moral crime is severe enough, he will be removed from office. However, even if he is removed, the goal will always be to redeem and restore. Punishment for punishment's sake is not the way of Christ.

After considering spiritual matters, Paul turns his sights toward *physical* matters. His specific concern is the *health* of the church leader. He writes, "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities" (v. 23). Can the Lord be served best with a healthy servant or a sickly one? In Scripture, wine and oil are used as medicines (cp. Luke 10:34; James 5:14). This verse is certainly not an endorsement for consuming alcoholic beverages for pleasurable purposes. Rather the good juice from the grape—fermented or unfermented—was prescribed as a medicine.

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### Reflection Connection

*Are you able to detect a healthy process of discipline in your church? Perhaps this would make a great opportunity for the pastor or a deacon to lead a short discussion on the process the church uses in administering church discipline.*



Fourth, Paul considered *eternal* matters. The Apostle focuses on the *hereafter*. He writes, “Some men’s sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some *men* they follow after. Likewise also the good works of *some* are manifest beforehand; and they that are otherwise cannot be hid” (vv. 24-25). On the one hand, Paul addresses the *sin question* (v. 24). The reality is, no person will ever “get by” with sin. If sin is not addressed in this life it will be addressed in the next. Hence, some men’s sins “follow after”; that is, while accountability was not exacted now, accountability will follow after death. Moses could not have been more precise, “Be sure your sins will find you out” (Num. 32:23).

On the other hand, Paul addresses the *service question* (v. 25). The good we do cannot be hidden forever. All good works culminate in God’s reward.

### Golden Greek Nugget

Paul cautioned Timothy not to receive an “accusation” against an elder except by the testimony of two or three witnesses (v. 19). The Greek term translated “accusation” is *kategoria* and literally means a “complaint.” God’s servants are especially open to perpetual attack because of their public position. Satan uses weak believers and sometimes unbelievers to mar the image of effective men in the pulpit. Paul’s advice protected God’s men from unsubstantiated “complaints” on the one hand and put a judicious process in place on the other to deal with leaders who sin or abuse their honored office.

### Wrap Up

*Chapter five has been a study of the organizational structure and processes of the local church. As a family, the church bears characteristics of support and encouragement to this of its family members. Our obligations run deep, and our commitments to one another extend far and wide. Even when family members sin, accountability must be maintained and the name of Christ protected. But our love for our brothers and sisters and our spiritual moms and dads keeps us from making them into a public spectacle. Instead we seek to redeem, restore, and forgive. Being a member in God’s forever family demands nothing less.*

