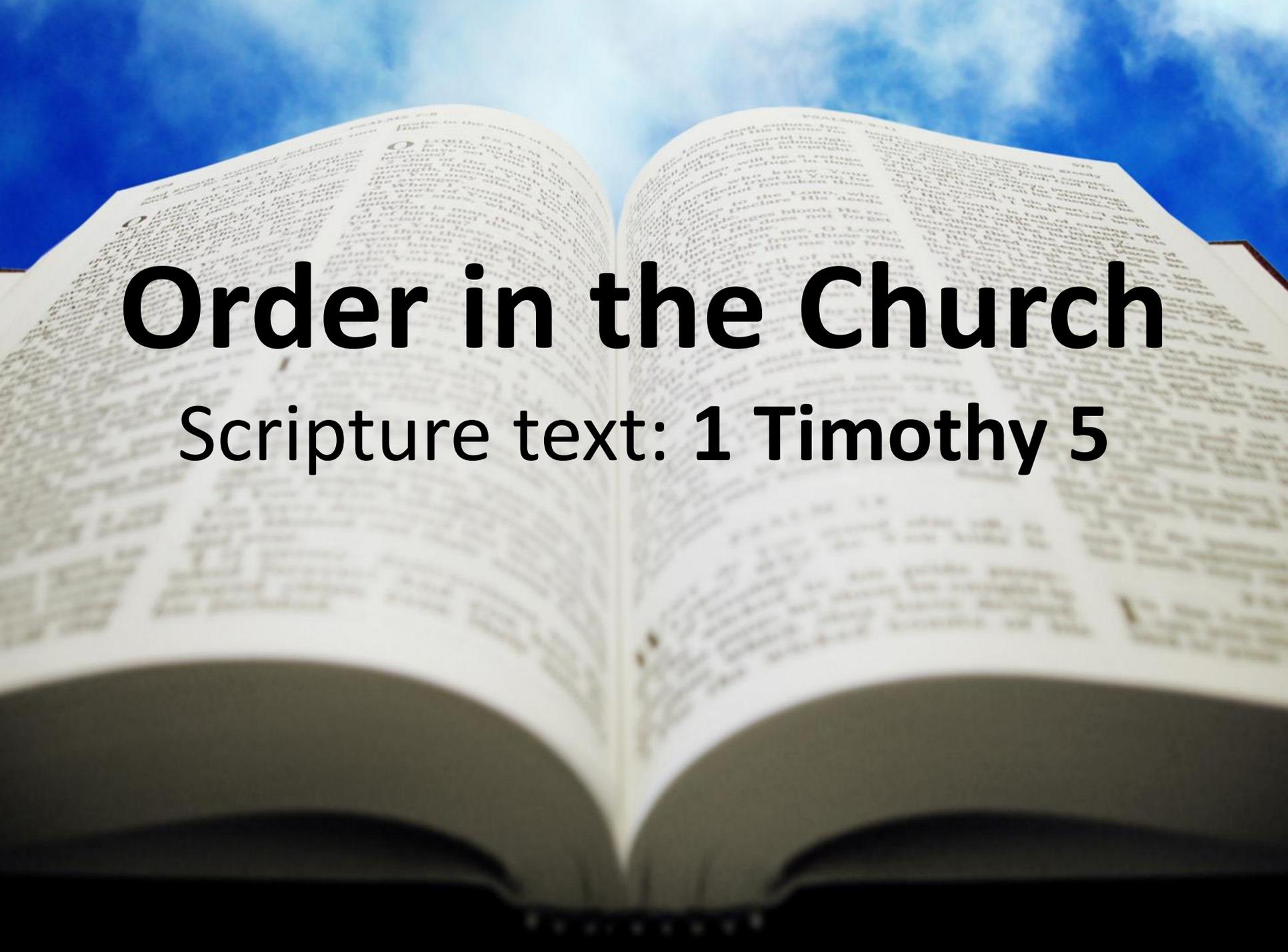


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Order in the Church

Scripture text: 1 Timothy 5

ORDER IN THE CHURCH!

The first problem the early church faced was also a modern one: **A group of church members was neglected by the ministering staff (Acts 6).**

I once heard a certain pastor described as “a man who is invisible during the week and incomprehensible on Sunday.” Again, somebody in his congregation was feeling neglected.

Then Paul instructed Timothy how to minister to specific groups in his church.

The Older Members (1 Tim. 5:1–2)

Paul admonished Timothy to minister to the various kinds of people in the church, and **not to show partiality** (1 Tim. 5:21).

Since Timothy was a younger man, he might be tempted to ignore the older members; so **Paul urged him to love and serve all** of the people, regardless of their ages.

The church is a family: Treat the older members like your mother and father, and the younger members like your brothers and sisters.

The Old Widows (1 Tim. 5:3–10)

From the beginning of its ministry, the church had a concern for believing widows (Acts 6:1; 9:39). Of course, the nation of Israel had sought to care for widows; and God had given special legislation to protect them (Deut. 10:18; 24:17; Isa. 1:17).

Deuteronomy 10:18 He executes justice **for the fatherless and the widow**, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.

Deuteronomy 24:17 "You shall not pervert the justice due to the sojourner or to the fatherless, or take a widow's garment in pledge,

Isaiah 1:16-17 Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, **plead the widow's cause.**

God's special care for the **widows is a recurring theme in Scripture.** It was only right that the local church show compassion to these women who were in need.

Deuteronomy 14:29 And the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you, and the sojourner, the fatherless, **and the widow, who are within your towns**, shall come and eat and be filled, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do.

Psalm 94:6-7 **They kill the widow** and the sojourner, and murder the fatherless; and they say, "The LORD does not see; the God of Jacob does not perceive."

Malachi 3:5-6 "Then I will draw near to you for judgment. **I will be a swift witness against** the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against **those who oppress** the hired worker in his wages, **the widow** and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts. **"For I the LORD do not change;** therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.

However, the **church must be careful not to waste its resources on people who really are not in need.**

Whether we like to admit it or not, there are individuals and entire families that “**milk**” local churches, **while they themselves refuse to work or to use their own resources wisely.** As long as they can get handouts from the church, why bother to go to work?

Paul listed the qualifications a widow must meet if she is to be supported by the church.

Without human support (vv. 5a, 8, “desolate”). If a widow had relatives they should care for her so that the **church might use its money to care for others who have no help**. If her own children were dead, then her grandchildren (the kjv translates them “nephews” in 1 Tim. 5:4) should accept the responsibility. When you recall that society in that day did not have the kind of institutions we have today—pensions, Social Security, retirement homes, etc.—**you can see how important family care really was**. Of course, the presence of such institutions today does not relieve any family of its loving obligations.

Exodus 20:12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

Ephesians 6:1-4 Children, **obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.** "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but **bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.**

Suppose a relative is unwilling to help support his loved one? **“He ... is worse than an unbeliever!”** was Paul’s judgment (1 Tim. 5:8).

A missionary friend of mine, now with the Lord, came home from the field to care for her sick and elderly parents. She was severely criticized by some of her associates (“We should love God more than father and mother!”), but she remained faithful to the end. Then she returned to the field for years of fruitful service, knowing she had obeyed God. **After all, we love God by loving His people;** and He has a special concern for the elderly, the widows, and the orphans.

A believer with a faithful testimony (vv. 5b–7). The church could not care for all the widows in the city, but **it should care for believers who are a part of the fellowship**. We should “do good unto all ... especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). A widow the church helps **should not be a self-indulgent person**, seeking pleasure, but a **godly woman who hopes in God and has a ministry of intercession and prayer**. See Luke 2:36–37 for an example of a godly widow.

It has been my experience in three different pastorates that godly widows are “**spiritual powerhouses**” in the church.

Galatians 6:10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and **especially to those who are of the household of faith.**

Luke 2:36-37 And there was a **prophetess**, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was **advanced in years**, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a **widow until she was eighty-four.** She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.

They are the backbone of the prayer meetings. They give themselves to visitation, and they swell the ranks of teachers in the Sunday School. It has also been my experience that, **if a widow is not godly, she can be a great problem to the church.** She will demand attention, complain about what the younger people do, and often “hang on the telephone” and gossip. (Of course, it is not really “gossip.” She only wants her friends to be able to “pray more intelligently” about these matters!) Paul made it clear (1 Tim. 5:7) **that church-helped widows must be “blameless” — irreproachable.**

At least sixty years old (v. 9a). A woman of this age was not likely to get remarried in that day, though sixty is not considered that “old” today. Perhaps the verb “taken into the number” gives us a clue. It literally means **“to be enrolled and put on the list.”** The word was used for the enrollment of soldiers. The early church had an official list of the names of qualified widows, and we get the impression that these **“enlisted” women ministered to the congregation in various ways.** (Remember Dorcas and her widow friends, Acts 9:36–43?) Paul probably would have told us if they had been officially ordained as deaconesses.

Act 9:36-39 Now there was in Joppa a **disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas**. She was full of good works and acts of charity. In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, "Please come to us without delay." So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. **All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them.**

Act 9:40-43 But Peter put them all outside, and knelt down and prayed; and turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then **calling the saints and widows**, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner.

A good marriage record (v. 9b).

We have met this same requirement before, for bishops (1 Tim. 3:2) and for deacons (1 Tim. 3:12).

The implication is that the widow was not a divorced woman. **Since younger widows were advised to remarry** (1 Tim. 5:14), this stipulation cannot refer to a woman who had a temporary second marriage after the death of her husband. **Faithfulness to one's marriage vows is very important in the eyes of God.**

A witness of good works (v. 10).

If a person is faithfully serving God, the light will shine and others will see it and glorify God (Matt. 5:16). **“Brought up children”** can refer either to a widow’s own children or the reference may be **to orphans who needed a home**. If it refers to her own children, then they would have to have died; otherwise the church would not support her. It is likely that the reference here is to **the practice of rescuing abandoned children and raising them to know the Lord**.

Hospitality is another factor, for this was an important ministry in those days when travel was dangerous and safe places to sleep were scarce.

The washing of feet does not refer to a special ritual, but to the common practice of washing a guest's feet when he arrived in the home (Luke 7:44). It was not beneath this woman's dignity to take the place of a humble servant.

Luke 7:44 Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? **I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet**, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.

“Relieved the afflicted” could cover many kinds of ministry to the needy: feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, encouraging the sorrowing, etc.

Every pastor gives thanks for godly women who minister to the material and physical needs in the church.

These widows were cared for by the church, but they, in turn, **helped to care for the church.**

The Younger Widows (1 Tim. 5:11–16)

The younger widows would technically be women under sixty years of age, but no doubt Paul had much younger women in mind. It was not likely that a fifty-nine-year-old woman would “bear children” if she remarried! (1 Tim. 5:14)

The dangers of travel, the ravages of disease, war, and a host of other things could rob a young wife of her husband. But Paul forbade Timothy to enroll the younger widows and put them under the care of the church.

The reasons for refusing them (vv. 11–14a). Because of their age, younger widows are naturally attracted to men and want to marry again. What is so bad about that? Paul seems to imply (1 Tim. 5:12) that each of the widows enrolled pledged herself to remain a widow and serve the Lord in the church. This pledge must not be interpreted as a “vow of celibacy,” nor should we look on this group of ministering widows as a “special monastic order.” There seemed to be an agreement between the widows and the church that they would remain widows and serve the Lord.

There is another possible interpretation: These younger widows, **if supported by the church, would have opportunities to “live it up”** and find other husbands, most likely unbelievers. By marrying unbelievers, **they would be casting off their first faith.** However, I prefer the first explanation.

Paul does make it clear (1 Tim. 5:13) that younger widows, if cared for by the church, **would have time on their hands and get involved in sinful activities.**

They would get in the habit of being idle instead of being useful. They would gad about from house to house and indulge in gossip and be busybodies. There is **a definite connection between idleness and sin.**

Paul warned Timothy against using the “charity” ministry of the church to encourage people to be idle. The church certainly ought to assist those who really need help, **but it must not subsidize sin.** As a pastor, I have had to make decisions in these matters, and **sometimes it is not easy.**

Requirements for younger widows (vv. 14b–16). Moving from the negative, Paul listed the positive things he wanted the younger widows to do to be accepted and approved in the church. He wanted the younger widows to marry and have families.

While not every person is supposed to get married, marriage is natural for most people who have been married before. Why remain in lonely widowhood if there was yet opportunity for a husband and a family? Of course, **all of this would have to be “in the Lord”** (1 Cor. 7:39).

“Be fruitful and multiply” was God’s mandate to our first parents (Gen. 1:28), so the normal result of marriage is a family. Those today who refuse to have children because of the “awfulness of the times” should check out how difficult the times were in Paul’s day! **If Christians do not have children and raise them to live for God, who will?**

“Guide the house” (1 Tim. 5:14)

literally means “rule the house.” The wife should manage the affairs of the household, and **her husband should trust her to do so** (Prov. 31:10–31). Of course, marriage is a partnership; but **each partner has a special sphere of responsibility.**

Few men can do in a home what a woman can do. Whenever my wife was ill, or caring for our babies, and I had to manage some of the affairs of the home, I discovered quickly that I was out of my sphere of ministry!

The result of all this is a good testimony that silences the accusers. Satan (the adversary) is always alert to an opportunity to invade and destroy a Christian home. The word occasion is a military term that means “**a base of operations.**” A Christian wife who is not doing her job at home gives Satan a beachhead for his operations, and the results are tragic. While there are times when a Christian wife and mother may have to work outside the home, **it must not destroy her ministry in the home.** The wife who works simply to get luxuries may discover too late that she has lost some necessities.

It may be all right to have what money can buy if you do not lose what money cannot buy.

How Christian wives and mothers manage their homes can be a testimony to those outside the church. Just as a pastor is to have a good reputation with outsiders (1 Tim. 3:7), and the servants are not to bring reproach on God's Word (1 Tim. 6:1), so the wives are to have a good witness. Women may not be able to be elders of the church, but **they can minister for the Lord right in their own homes.** (See Titus 2:4–5 for an additional emphasis on this vital ministry.)

Paul then summarized the principle of each family caring for the needs of its own members (1 Tim. 5:16). Paul did not tell them how these widows should be relieved—giving them a regular dole, taking them into a home, giving them employment, etc. Each local assembly would have to decide this according to the needs of individual cases.

How does this principle apply to Christians today?

Certainly we must honor our parents and grandparents and seek to provide for them if they have needs. Not every Christian family is able to take in another member, and not every widow wants to live with her children.

Where there is sickness or handicap, professional care is necessary, and perhaps this cannot be given in a home.

Each family must decide what God's will is in the matter, and no decision is easy.

The important thing is that believers show love and concern and do all they can to help each other.