



## **LESSON FIVE**

### How to Treat the Saints of Different Ages

Scripture Reading:

#### **1 TIMOTHY 5:1-25**

- 5:1 Do not upbraid an elderly man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers,
- 5:2 Elderly women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.
- 5:3 Honor widows who are really widows.
- 5:4 But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show respect toward their own household and to render a return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God.
- 5:5 Now she who is really a widow and is left alone has set her hope on God and continues in petitions and prayers night and day.
- 5:6 But she who gives herself to pleasure is dead while living.
- 5:7 These things also charge, that they may be without reproach.
- 5:8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.
- 5:9 Let a widow be enrolled, not under sixty years old, having been the wife of one man
- 5:10 Well attested for good works, if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work.
- 5:11 But younger widows refuse; for when they follow their passions in disregard of Christ, they desire to marry,
- 5:12 And thus have condemnation because they have set aside their first pledge.
- 5:13 And at the same time they also learn to be idle, going around from house to house; and they are not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.
- 5:14 I will therefore that younger widows marry, bear children, keep house, give no opportunity to the opposer for reproach;
- 5:15 For already some have turned aside after Satan.
- 5:16 If any believing woman has widows in her family, let her assist them, and let not the church be burdened, that it may assist those who are really widows.
- 5:17 Let the elders who take the lead well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in word and teaching.
- 5:18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox that is treading out the grain," and, "The workman is worthy of his pay."
- 5:19 Against an elder do not receive an accusation, except based upon two or three witnesses.
- 5:20 The ones who sin reprove before all that the rest also may have fear.
- 5:21 I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus and the chosen angels that you keep these things without prejudice, doing nothing by way of partiality.
- 5:22 Lay hands quickly on no man, nor participate in others' sins; keep yourself pure.
- 5:23 No longer drink water only, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.

- 5:24 The sins of some men are openly manifest, going before to judgment; and for others, they also follow after.
- 5:25 Likewise also the good works are openly manifest, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden.

## **QUESTIONS:**

### **SECTION 1:**

1. Why is it so important for us to live a normal human life?
2. How do we contact the saints in a human way?

### **SECTION 2:**

1. How do we exercise wisdom in dealing with the saints of different ages?
2. Please give some examples of dealing with the saints “in all purity”?
3. How do we know that everyone in the church has certain duties to perform?

### **SECTION 3:**

1. What does it mean for the elders to “be counted of double honour”?
2. In the New Testament, how were the elders appointed?
3. In handling accusations against the elders, what are the three matters that need to be observed?

### **SECTION 4:**

1. According to verses 24 and 25, how should we react toward others in approving or condemning them?
2. What should our response be to accusations towards others? Please relate to your own experience.
3. What are the four points we must observe in dealing with the administration of the church? How can we apply this to our daily living?

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### **THE DIVINE STANDARD AND THE HUMAN LEVEL**

At the end of chapter three Paul comes to the high point of God’s economy. In 3:15 and 16 we see the

divine standard. But in 5:1-16 Paul comes down to the human level. On the one hand, in the church life we must have the divine standard; on the other hand, we must care for matters on the human level. In 5:8, for example, Paul speaks of providing for our own relatives. All the instructions in this chapter are

very human, normal, and ordinary. Nothing is special, miraculous, or supernatural. The whole book is written in the same principle. This is necessary for the church life.

The principle of presenting both the divine standard and the human level is found not only in 1 Timothy, but also in the Epistles of Ephesians and Colossians. In Ephesians Paul first writes concerning the church according to the divine standard. Afterward, on the human level, he writes about husbands, wives, parents, children, slaves, and masters. In like manner, in Colossians Paul first writes about Christ according to the divine standard. Then he speaks on a human level about family matters. In 1 Timothy Paul does not come to the human level directly. Rather, he comes to this level by giving instructions to Timothy. In 5:1-16 Paul tells Timothy how to deal with the saints of different ages.

### **LIVING A NORMAL HUMAN LIFE**

First, all the instructions given here are presented in a very human way. We should never think that if we reach God's standard, we no longer need to be human. Some believers have been influenced by the false teaching that Christians should be like angels, that it is no longer necessary for them to lead a normal human life.

We all need to learn to be human. In fact, the more spiritual we are, the more human we shall be. If we would live Christ, we must learn to be human in a genuine way. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He was very human.

To damage humanity is to ruin both the means and the channel created by God for His economy. The reason demons and fallen angels forbid marriage and command people to abstain from foods is that their intention is to destroy mankind. Thus, we in the church must be human and follow the standards of normal human living. Some have falsely accused us of not being human. We utterly repudiate these allegations. In the church life we definitely emphasize the proper humanity... We appreciate the angels, but we do not want to imitate them. Instead, we prefer to be human.

We should be human Christians. On the one hand, we have the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4); on the other hand, we are normal human beings. The fact that we have the divine nature with the divine life does not mean that we shall ever be deified. Rather, we are

to live a genuinely human life by the divine life and nature. In this way we shall be able to live the highest human life, a life like that of the Lord Jesus. When He was on earth, He lived a human life by means of the divine life and the divine nature. The Lord's human living was by the divine life. Our human living should be the same. Thus, we all must learn to be human.

In 5:1-16 we see that Paul instructed his young co-worker Timothy to contact the saints in a human way. Verse 1 says, "Do not upbraid an elderly man, but entreat him as a father." To entreat an elderly man as a father is surely to behave in a very human manner. In relation to brothers who are a generation older than they, the younger brothers should deal with them as fathers.

Paul also tells Timothy to entreat "younger men as brothers; elderly women as mothers; younger women as sisters." Timothy was not to assume an elevated position as a bishop, regarding himself as superior to others. On the contrary, he was to behave as a brother to younger brothers and sisters, as a son to a father, and as a son to a mother. In the church life there are many fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters. To deal with the saints as such is to behave humanly.

Our contact with the saints must be in a proper atmosphere and with the right attitude and spirit. The atmosphere, attitude, and spirit in our contact with others mean a great deal. If a young brother assumes some kind of elevated position in relation to an elderly man, the relationship between them will be damaged. But if he would contact him as a son speaking to a father, their fellowship will be intimate, loving, touching, and even inspiring.

Suppose that in my relationship with the saints I conduct myself as a teacher and treat the saints as my pupils. If this is my attitude, my contact with the saints will be quite poor. But if I am very human in my relationships with the saints and regard myself as a brother among brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, the contact will be loving and intimate. What a difference it makes when we are truly human in our relationships to one another! I repeat, in the church life we all must be human.

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### **EXERCISING WISDOM**

In 5:1-16 we see in the second place that Paul instructed Timothy to exercise wisdom. His word not to upbraid an elderly man, but to entreat him as a father is a word of wisdom. It is a matter of wisdom not to rebuke sharply an elderly man. In dealing with saints of different ages, we need not only love, but also wisdom. We need to realize whom we are contacting. Are we speaking to an elderly brother or sister? Then we must speak to them as a son to a father or mother. Are we contacting a younger brother or sister? Then we must speak to them as a brother to a brother or a brother to a sister. Furthermore, we should speak one way to a father, another way to a mother, and in other ways to brothers and sisters. For example, in our human family we do not speak in the same way to all members of the family. We do not talk to our father in the same way as we do to our mother. If we speak the same way to all members of our family, we are indeed foolish. In all our relationships with saints of different ages we need wisdom.

If we exercise wisdom, we shall speak differently to saints of different ages. The brothers will talk to brothers in a way appropriate to brothers, but they will speak to sisters in a way appropriate to sisters. This is wisdom. We must not speak to a young sister in the same way as we do to an elderly man. Furthermore, one sister may embrace another. But a young sister should not show her love for a brother, young or old, by embracing him. Do not love the saints in a foolish way. Instead, always exercise wisdom, realizing whom you are contacting.

### **IN ALL PURITY**

Third, all our dealings with the saints must be “in all purity” (5:2). Every contact with the brothers and sisters in the church life must be pure in every way. We need to be pure in our motive and intention.

In the contact between brothers and sisters there is especially the need for all purity. For this reason, a brother and sister who are close to the same age should not talk privately in a closed room. Either another brother or another sister should be present. Consider the example of the Lord Jesus. He spoke to Nicodemus in a house alone at night, but He talked to the Samaritan woman out in the open during the day. This indicates that the contact between brothers and sisters must be in all purity.

In the church life the traffic in fellowship between brothers and sisters cannot be avoided. If we do not exercise all purity, we may fall into some kind of snare. Many have fallen into a snare because they were careless and failed to exercise purity in their contact with others. Therefore, we would emphasize again and again that the contact between brothers and sisters must be in all purity.

As we have indicated, our contact with all the saints, brothers and sisters, elderly and young, must be pure in every way. In speaking to an elderly sister as a mother, you need to be pure in your motive. It is evil to have impure motives. To have an impure motive means to seek gain for ourselves, to seek some kind of advantage or promotion. In our contact with all the saints in the church life we should have just one motive—to minister Christ to them that they may grow in the Lord.

### **DOING OUR DUTY**

The fourth point I would bring out in this message is the matter of our duty. We need to be human, we need to exercise wisdom, we need to have all purity, and we need to do our duty. In the church life everyone must have certain duties to perform. No one should be idle or a busybody. In 5:4 Paul says, “But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness toward their own household and to render a return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God.” Return here denotes requital, recompense. To render such a return is to show gratitude to one’s parents.

In verse 13 Paul speaks of those who “learn to be idle, going around from house to house; and not only idle, but also gossips and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.” Some are idle, seemingly having nothing to do. But their idleness causes them to become busybodies. They go around from house to house gossiping and “speaking things which they ought not.” No one in the church should be idle, and no one should be a gossip or a busybody. Instead, everyone should have something to do, some proper duty to perform.

Realizing the need for all the saints to do their duty, Paul tells Timothy not to allow a widow to be enrolled who is under sixty years old (v. 9). He then tells Timothy to refuse younger widows, for they may set aside their first pledge, or faith (vv. 11-12). Setting aside “their first pledge” means to break a pledge or promise. This indicates that some younger

widows promised, pledged, to devote themselves in their widowhood to some service of the church.

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## **DEALING WITH THE ELDERS**

In 5:17-25 Paul instructs Timothy concerning how to deal with the elders. The elders are the authority, or the government, of a local church. Thus, to deal with the elders is to deal with the authority, the government, the administration, of the church. For centuries there has been a debate among Christians over the kind of administration there should be in the church. In 5:17-25 Paul touches the crucial matter of the church's administration.

### **I. ELDERS COUNTED WORTHY OF DOUBLE HONOR**

Verses 17 and 18 say, "Let the elders who take the lead well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in word and teaching. For the Scripture says, You shall not muzzle a threshing ox, and, The workman is worthy of his pay." According to verse 18, the expression "double honor" includes material supply. Especially those who labor in word and teaching should receive this necessary supply. All the elders should be able to take the lead in a local church, but some, not all, have a special capacity in teaching. The word in verse 17 denotes the general speaking of doctrines, and teaching denotes instructions concerning particular things. Those who labor in word and teaching may be fully occupied, devoting all their time to this. Therefore, the church and the saints should care for their living. For this reason, in verse 18 Paul refers to what the Scripture says about not muzzling a threshing ox and about the workman being worthy of his pay.

### **II. AN ACCUSATION AGAINST AN ELDER**

In verse 19 Paul goes on to say, "Against an elder do not receive an accusation, except on the word of two or three witnesses." According to the Greek here, the accusation made against an elder should not merely be verbal; rather, it should be put in writing. To make an accusation against an elder is a very serious matter. For the sake of accuracy, it should be put in writing and not merely be spoken. Furthermore, it should not be received except on the word of two or three witnesses.

Verse 19 is simple, but it implies something very important. The fact that Timothy was charged by Paul to receive an accusation against an elder indicates that the apostles have authority to deal with the elders after they have been appointed by the apostles to be elders. There is no doubt that the written accusation against an elder was to be presented to Timothy. Who, then, was Timothy? According to those who are in favor of a hierarchical system in which the bishops are over the elders, Timothy is regarded as a bishop. But as we have previously pointed out, according to the New Testament, bishops are elders, and elders are bishops. These terms are synonymous and refer to the same people. We know from 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 2:6 that Timothy was an apostle. Furthermore, in the book of 1 Timothy we see that Timothy was the representative of the Apostle Paul. Therefore, for an accusation to come to Timothy was for it to come to an apostle. We would expect such an accusation to come to the apostles because they were the ones who had appointed the elders.

Some have had the concept from reading Brother Nee's book *The Normal Christian Church Life* that once apostles have appointed elders in a particular local church, the apostles do not under any circumstances have the right to interfere with the affairs of that church. This, however, is a misunderstanding of Brother Nee's word. In another book, *Church Affairs*, Brother Nee points out that after the elders have been appointed by the apostles, they should take the lead in the church according to the apostles' teaching. If the elders lead others astray or if they are wrong in some way, accusation against them can be made by the saints to the apostles.

However, an apostle is not a pope. If we read the New Testament carefully, we shall see that the elders are not appointed by anyone who is a dictator or who exercises autonomous authority. On the contrary, elders are appointed in the way of life. As the saints in a particular locality meet together to worship God and to serve the Lord, it will be manifested that certain brothers have a greater degree of maturity than others. Although no one will be fully mature, some will be comparatively mature. Not even in Philippians 3 did Paul regard himself as matured in full. Because maturity is relative, the qualifications of an elder are not

absolute. In other words, an elder's qualifications are comparative. Among all the saints in a local church, certain brothers, by comparison, are more qualified and mature than others. These brothers are manifested as such before the eyes of the church, and all the saints clearly realize that these are the ones who should be appointed elders. This appointment does not come either by a vote of the congregation or by the exercise of autonomous authority. Instead, elders are selected according to the insight and foresight of the saints. Based upon the saints' insight and foresight, the apostles then appoint certain ones to be elders. The apostles minister the Word, bring others to the Lord's salvation, and edify them after they are saved; they also establish these believers as a local church. Therefore, they have the standing and the position to say that those who have been manifested as relatively more mature than others should be appointed elders.

In verse 20 Paul continues, "Those who sin reprove before all that the rest also may be in fear." The fact that apostles can rebuke elders who sin indicates that the apostles have authority over the elders. The expression "before all" refers to the whole church. A sinning elder should receive public reproof because of his public position. If an elder is reproved publicly, the rest of the elders will be "in fear."

Verse 21 says, "I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus and the chosen angels that you guard these things without prejudice, doing nothing by way of partiality." The elders in a local church are God's deputy authority. Dealing with them is a solemn thing before God. Hence, the apostle solemnly charged Timothy before God, Christ, and the angels to do it in such a way that the chosen angels, the good angels with God's authority, may see that His authority is established and maintained among His redeemed people on earth.

Paul's use of the term "chosen angels" indicates that here he is dealing with administration, government, authority. The book of Daniel indicates that the chosen angels are authorities, representatives of God's administration. Paul deliberately uses the term "chosen angels" to indicate that here his instructions are related to administration,

government, and authority in the church. Paul not only charged Timothy before God and Christ Jesus, but also charged him before the chosen angels.

Paul's charge to Timothy in verse 21 was to "guard these things without prejudice, doing nothing by way of partiality." To guard is to observe and keep. Prejudice refers to prejudgment, condemnation, before hearing the case, and partiality refers to inclination, favor, or bias. The words "without prejudice" imply without prejudgment to the credit of the accuser, whereas "doing nothing by way of partiality" implies no perverted favor to the accused elder. On the one hand, Timothy was not to take sides with those who made an accusation against an elder. To give them credit in a hasty way would be to show prejudice. On the other hand, Timothy was not to be partial, not to show perverted favor, to the elder against whom the accusation was made. Therefore, in handling an accusation against an elder, three matters should be observed: first, there must be the word of two or three witnesses; second, there should be no prejudice; and third, nothing should be done by partiality. No credit should be given privately to the accusers, and there should not be any perverted favor toward the one accused.

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### III. LAYING HANDS ON ELDERS

In order to follow these instructions, Timothy was charged not to act in haste. Verse 22 says, "Lay hands quickly on no man, nor participate in others' sins; keep yourself pure." We have seen that laying on of hands has two functions, identification and impartation. According to the context of the previous verses, here the laying on of hands refers primarily to laying hands on the elders. This should not be done hastily.

In verse 23 Paul goes on to say, "No longer drink water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent weaknesses." According to the context, this verse implies that the condition of one's physical health may affect his spiritual dealing with others.

In verses 24 and 25 Paul says, "The sins of some men are manifest beforehand, going before to judgment, and some also they follow after. Likewise also, the good works are manifest

beforehand, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden.” The word sins in verse 24 indicates that this verse continues verse 22. It explains that some people’s sins are manifest earlier and others’, later. Hence, we should not lay hands on anyone in haste. What is mentioned here concerning the judging of sins is a principle applicable both to man’s judgment and God’s. The words “some also they follow after” refer to the sins of others now being hidden, but later manifest, going to judgment later.

The implication of the apostle’s charge in these two verses is that Timothy should not approve a person hastily because sins have not been manifested, nor condemn a person in haste because good works have not been manifested. Often a person’s wrongdoings are concealed. It takes time for them to be exposed. However, sometimes a person’s good deeds are also hidden, possibly covered by false accusations and rumors. Time is also necessary for the falsehood to be dispelled and the real situation to be brought to light. Thus, we should not make a quick decision whether an elder is right or wrong. Instead, we should wait and allow time to expose the situation.

It is easy for us to make quick decisions and hasty judgments. But even though it is difficult to take time in matters such as these, we need to learn not to be hasty. The elders should follow this principle in caring for the church. They should not judge anything or anyone hastily. What they do should be with witnesses and without prejudice, partiality, or haste.

A number of times saints have come to me with accusations against an elder. My response always has been to say, “Let me pray and then have fellowship with some co-workers about this situation.” Because an accuser sometimes wanted a hasty judgment, he rebuked me and claimed that I took sides with the one accused. However, I did not take sides with anyone. Instead, I wanted to pray and have fellowship with others in order not to act in haste.

The church is very different from any worldly organization and also different from organized Christianity. The church is according to the Lord’s mercy and grace and under His authority. In dealing with the administration of the church, we must observe the four points of having witnesses and of acting without prejudice, partiality, or haste. Do not show prejudice in receiving an accusation, and do

not show partiality in defending anyone against accusation. Instead, take time, pray, have fellowship with those who possess spiritual insight, and wait for the Lord’s leading.

Often elders have told me of the need for more elders in their locality. Usually they would recommend someone to be appointed to the eldership. Then I would ask how long the brother has been saved, how long he has been in the church life, and how much he has grown in the Lord. Then I would encourage the brothers to wait for another period of time and also to pray. As a result, many have learned that my practice is always to tell others to wait and pray. Actually, this is not my policy; it is the instruction of the Apostle Paul. After a period of time has passed and the leading ones in a certain place still feel that a brother should be appointed to the eldership and that, comparatively speaking, there is no one more qualified than he, I may recommend that he serve as an apprentice in order to be proved. This means that he will share the responsibility of an elder, but yet not occupy the position of an elder.

In dealing with the administration of a local church, we follow neither the way of dictatorship nor democracy. Elders are not appointed by a dictator; neither are they elected by a vote of the congregation. ... there is no such thing as an autonomous dictator. We do not practice dictatorship, but we do recognize the divine authority, the divine life, and the divine light. The administration of a local church is not according to the way of worldly government or organization. But in the church we have the Lord’s headship with the divine nature, life, light, wisdom, and grace. Therefore, we pray and wait on Him as we watch and observe the growth of the saints. In those very rare cases where there is ground for accusation against an elder, we do not act in haste. On the contrary, we wait and pray. We know from verses 24 and 25 that eventually a person’s sins or good works will be manifest. As the snow melts and exposes the rocks hidden beneath it, so either a person’s sins or his good deeds will eventually be brought to light. For this reason, we neither receive an accusation against an elder nor justify an elder in a hasty way. Rather, we would make sure that the accusation is substantiated by two or three witnesses and then we would act without prejudice, partiality, or haste. Furthermore, we acknowledge the Lord’s sovereignty and wait for Him to make the situation clear.

We thank the Lord that, in His mercy, He has opened His Word to us and established the ministry of the Word among us so that all the churches may be supplied and that all the saints may be nourished. The Lord's way to care for the churches is the way of supply and nourishment.

Very rarely is there any exercise of authority among us ... I avoid the exercise of authority whenever possible. Even though I may have the standing in the Lord to say something, my practice is not to exercise authority. In like manner, rarely do the elders in the local churches exercise authority. Our desire is to care for the saints, to love them, feed them, comfort them, and encourage them. This is the proper way for elders to function, for we are not an organization, but we are an organic entity, the Body of Christ.