

The 5th Commandment & the Family

Let us turn to our Bibles to 1st Timothy chapter 5, 1st Timothy chapter 5, verse 8. 5 verse 8, let us listen attentively to the word of God. 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. Let us pray.

Gracious God above, as we read this text, and see the importance and import therein, by the Holy Spirit warning, apparently, those who need to hear under Timothy's ministry, the importance of taking care of their own. As he emphatically mentions this three times, the beginning, the middle, and the end of the set of verses. God, may it encourage us to know that you are working within us, because we are taking care of our family.

And Lord, may this be an encouragement as well, better instruction as well. This morning, as we go into the details of this, and so far as we live in a day and age in which undermines and attacks this way of thinking as being even unchristian. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, strengthen us, we pray, and encourage us to maintain by the power of the Spirit within us this call of all Christians to take care of their own, especially of their household.

Amen. There was a study erected, part of a series of studies, as you can imagine in the social sciences and psychology and the like. They have themes, they try to investigate with different kinds of study.

This particular study investigated the people's prioritizations in life, moral priorities. It was labeled the ideological differences in the expanse of the moral circle. All that to say that it was a question of what would they do with certain groups of things or people in this world in terms of prioritizing their love, their care, and their concern.

It was the latest in many similar studies, as I pointed out, about moral thinking. The participants rated their own ideological stance first and foremost. You knew where they were on the sociological and political spectrum, and fairly mapped with known political and social groups, of course.

Each participant was then given 100 moral units. 100 moral units. Imagine, of course, that you have to think of a way to investigate moral priorities, and one way is to realize you're limited.

You're finite. You can only spend so much time, money, and energy on any one given thing, and that's represented in this scenario as 100 moral units. To allocate among 16 categories of peoples and things in the known universe.

Isn't that interesting? You can imagine concentric circles. The known universe, 16 circles, each embedded in the other. From the immediate family and the closest friends, that's the smaller circle.

Friends would actually be another circle. To acquaintances and random strangers to the entire country, entire continents, and even humans. All humans is yet another circle.

It's the broader circle, right? Further out, the list includes animals, even amoebas, aliens, plants, and rocks. They covered everything. 16 categories.

The moral units represented, of course, their capacity to help, care, or otherwise empathize with these categories. The allocation was divided amongst the 16s, both in one study, the same people, ideally, how would you like to do it ideally, and the other way is how you actually did it in real life. Right? So they're kind of getting particular and thorough here.

It seems like a no-brainer. How many moral units are you going to put for aliens and amoebas? Zero. You're going to put nothing for those things, right? Surely the vast majority of the whole 100 moral units would go to those closest to us, family, friends, and church.

And as the circle of categories got broader, out to the animals, you might have some care, like for your own animals, probably they're thinking of my dog, my cat. Aliens and rocks and the like would be nothing. So it would be obvious concentric circles.

The most intense would be down here, the smallest. And as you go out, you virtually have no more points left over. 100 points are all gone by then.

We're like, yeah, of course, Pastor, of course. You know where I'm going with this, obviously. That wasn't the case with a number of the participants.

I mean, this is just a scenario. It's not like real life, and they still can't get it right. That's how bad and messed up things are.

It's really amazing. The study showed differently. One group was, quote, more likely to include non-humans, even aliens and rocks, in their moral calculations.

In fact, the more they identified with that particular ideological group, they would allocate equally to humans and non-humans. Everything's, what, egalitarian and put on the same level. It's not like real life, brothers and sisters.

They're like, what would you, we want to know what's on your mind. This is what's on their mind. More of them, in comparison to the other group, gave moral empathy and care to nurture rocks and even aliens.

If you look at a heat map, right, red being the most number of moral points you put in the smaller circle or the bigger circle. The one group have everything in the small circle, very red here, and it gets cooler and more blue to virtually black in the outer circle. This other group, it's the other way around.

The red, the intensity of moral attachment, was higher out of the circle, and over here in the inner circle, the family and friends was more cool and blue. Yes, brothers and sisters, these people vote. And you see the actions they're in.

The application to our text is straightforward. Paul, by the inspiration of the Spirit, directs Christians through the ministry of Timothy to prioritize what? Their own and their household. It should be red down here in the smaller circles.

That's where you put most of your moral points and your efforts and your concentration and your daily life, both ideally and in practice. But more and more Americans are turning away from their families and those close to them, and even their own nation. And unfortunately, this is affecting the churches as well.

The Fifth Commandment and You

So let's unpack this verse and the doctrine taught under the rubric of the Fifth Commandment, which is the foundation of all human societies, whether it be city, county, state, or nation, and everything in between, businesses, clubs. The American scene, as you know, is very individualistic, but the Bible is very family, in terms of understanding how things are functioning in society. So the first point here is the Fifth Commandment in you, going over more broadly.

The Fifth Commandment itself, as we know, is in Exodus 20, verse 12. Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God has given you. There you go.

And as we know, it's a summary of a lot more going on in that commandment, as we see in these verses. It's a foundational relationship of the human race. Adam and Eve, a family, begat the human race.

And we are especially tied to those close to us by blood, marriage, and family, and the like. It's assumed moral stance of the Bible, and explicit here. When even the most needy of the society, we don't think of it this way because we have so much prosperity, widows can go their whole life without getting married, and no one taking care of them because they can get a PhD job, and whatever the case is, become an engineer, and they can support themselves.

We forget, back then, you're a widow, you're near death. Most of the world live close to the earth, like farmers. And the orphans, and the like, are really needy people.

And Paul is saying, they must be taken care of by their family. It's scope, the scope of the Fifth Commandment. In the larger catechism, it expounds the Fifth Commandment in a slightly different way with respect to the other commandments.

The other ones are like, what is a command, and what is a forbid? This one is a little different, because the general scope, question 126 of the larger catechism tells us, the general scope of the Fifth Commandment is the performance of those duties which we mutually owe in our several relations. It's about responsibilities and moral debt to one another. And there's a lot of different relationships, aren't there? There's fathers, there's mothers, there's kings, there's servants, there's bosses and workers.

All those kind of relationships are divided up and described this way in the Confession, and historically, in terms of moral ethics in the church, as the duties of inferiors, superiors, and equals. Language, of course, that the Americans really balk at today. Even church officers

I've seen, written little essays on their blogs saying, well, they're trying to tone down the language of their own Confession.

Several relations here, the language of several relations, of course, as I just said, includes all kinds of relationships. The Fifth Commandment isn't merely and only and simply about biological parents. They are a stand-in for all authority in your life.

That's why, even in the Bible, kings are called what? Fathers. Using the moral idea of a family for society. That kind of intimate relationship, although, of course, not that intimate, the idea of being the king should treat their nation not as someone to be exploited, like a stranger, but as family members, in a more real sense.

The Fifth Commandment is about mutual or reciprocal relationships and responsibilities. Relationships have moral duties that we owe to each other. That's the language here.

From leading to submitting to including treating each other as equals, if every relationship, of course, personal or collective, is reduced to equality or the egalitarianism that's the religion of the American way today, then we end up in social chaos with judges of the law treating criminals as equals to all others and parents not controlling their own kids. Oh, wait, it's already happening, isn't it? It's no accident. The Catechism uses that unflattering language of inferior, superiors, and equals about the relationship and responsibilities.

So parents are superior to the kids in terms of duty and responsibility that they have that kids don't have. And they don't want to have it, and I don't want to give it to them. They couldn't pull it off.

They couldn't get to work. They couldn't buy a house. They couldn't feed their family.

They starved to death. So they're superior in that way, although the kid may be better at, like a teenager, better at math than the parents. So he's superior in that way compared to the parents.

It's all comparative. That's all they mean. But it highlights the importance of the relationships.

That's why that language is useful. In this case, the superior is the widow, and the inferior are the children or the grandchildren. They owe her a debt of gratitude by taking care of her.

That's the idea. See, in the language of owe, as we have in our confession, it's not the language of rights in the American context, is it? The idea of rights is what do you owe me? You ought to give it to me. It's me.

Person. Selfish. Where often, I'm not saying it's wrong to use the language of rights.

That's fine legally. But that's how they think of it often. But here, in the Bible, of course, and the confession summarized in the Bible, it's the other way around.

What do I owe you? What should I do for you? What can I do for you? That's different, isn't it? In marriage, that would put the burden of responsibility upon each of us toward each other. It reverses the emphasis, in other words, of owing, from what we think others owe us, such as love and respect, to what we owe them. It does not preclude us, of course, ever thinking about what is owed us, especially like food and shelter.

Mom and Dad, you're not providing for us. This is bad. But it's a general orientation to remind us, to keep us humble.

1 Timothy 5, as I said, is about the widow and how she has this superior relationship and the family ought to take care of her. The family matters. Paul thought the family mattered enough that he spent 16 verses on the relationship of the family to the widows.

Yes, he preached the gospel, but he also preached the law of God because the gospel did not annul the law. And he ties it to the gospel. How does he tie the gospel to this command to take care of your own? Verse 8 tells us right then and there, if you don't do it, you've denied what? The faith.

You've denied the gospel. Broadly conceived. You're not saved by works, but if you recall, that's why he uses the word faith.

It's more the objective idea of the content of what you should believe and act as one who is saved by the good news. That is the gospel. So this is more broadly understood then.

What is commanded? So question 127 of the larger catechism, what is the honor, that's the language of Exodus 20, it's also the language here, honor the true widows. What is the honor that inferiors owe to their superiors or children and grandchildren owe to their parents or the parents owe to their grandparents, depending on how you look at the relationship, but it's all there. The honor which inferiors owe to their superiors, and of course again it's all levels and parts of life, not just family, is due reverence in heart, word and behavior, prayer and thanksgiving, imitation of their virtues, willing obedience to the lawful commands, due submission to the corrections and the like, maintenance of their persons and authority according to their several ranks and the nature of their places.

I didn't read the rest of it because it's longer than that. And I want to highlight here, maintenance of their persons, maintaining, protecting, watching over, it's a very broad term here. We have an example of this in Genesis 45, where Old Testament saints, what, took care of their own, especially their household.

In Genesis 45, 9 we read, Hurry up and go to my father, and say to him, Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all ages, come down to me and do not tarry. You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, you shall be near to me, you and your children, and your children's children, your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. And what will he do? There I will provide for you, lest you and your household and all that you have come to poverty, for there are still five years of famine.

He was estranged from his family, as you know, for many years, thought dead, and he still had heart and concern and care for them as he ought to have. And to put a fine point on it,

did he send messages to other people across the Mediterranean, to the Palestinians or the Phoenicians or the Canaanites, and say, Hey, why don't you come over here? No, he focused on what? His family. Get over here quick, before you die.

I'll take care of you. He took care of the nation, of course. He was like one of them, his own, but he also took especially his household, his family here.

The Fifth Commandment and Your Own

The fifth commandment, one's own. A paraphrase given in Jameson's et al. commentary is, I think, helpful here.

Paraphrase of verse 8. If any, a general proposition, he notes, therefore including in its application the widow's children or grandchildren, provide not for his own, that is, relations in general, and especially for those of his own house, that is, in particular, he hath practically denied the faith. That's what Paul is explaining here. Another way of looking at this is, faith without works is dead.

And here, works and love. Don't you love your own family? Those close to you? You ought to. And so, show that love at home.

You better be showing it at home. Paul says that's a serious problem. One's own.

One's own, that language here more precisely, I'm saying one's own, for those of his, does not provide for his own. For his own. It's an interesting word, that word own.

O-W-N. Again, we don't like that in America. I don't own anybody.

You don't own your kids. They're free. They got free will.

Even if you grant that, they don't have very smart will, I'll tell you that. Terrible, terrifying world out there. The idea of ownership here, because that's what it is.

One's own. It's actually a term of endearment. It's used a number of times in the New Testament.

You can clearly see the idea is not, I'm better than you. What's your problem? You're inferior to me. You're a little slave for me.

That's not the idea at all. It's a preciousness. It's a family here.

It should be. One's own. You're my own in a way that others are not.

Even best friends are not my own like a family is. That preciousness. It's not an overbearing claim of superiority.

That's not the idea at all. The word in particular is the idea of belonging to a particular thing or persons. In opposition to public property or what belongs to another.

You have that distinction. Mine, not mine. That's the idea here.

A particular application of this word own in the Bible is used in a number of ways. Clearly here is your family, but also for one's own people, one's own countrymen, for example. Here we have the contrast to provide for his own and especially for those of his households.

You have two groups here. One's own is a broader category. That's all the relations that he has.

Maybe not all of them, but those that he has interaction with. He can do something with them. Then your household, which is specifically that which is under your control.

As we say today, they're living with you. They're in the same house. You're taking care of them.

This is what we have here. The fifth commandment, one's own, which we would say today would be grandparents, nephews, uncles, aunts. That would be the category of one's own as opposed to the immediate family or the household.

That's our context today, but the context back then, one's own was even a little broader than that because the household often included what? Your grandparents, maybe the grandkids. You see that with Abraham, of course. He's got the whole kibble there.

When he says one's own here, he means even broader than what we think of typically in the American context. Think about it. Cousin once removed or something.

I don't know. I lose track after uncles. I just call them cousins or nephews and whatnot.

That's what he's talking about. Here then, it's a different frame of reference is what I'm highlighting. It's broader than what we have today, but nevertheless, obviously still applicable.

He's talking about here for our context again, our relatives, our uncles, our grandparents and the like and maybe even close friends. They become practically part of the family, we say. Who helps in particular? If anyone, so it's not just the man of the house.

He has a responsibility to be sure, but all the family members and all the other relatives, in fact. They even go down to the grandchildren here in the context explicitly to take care of what? One another. Very broadly, of course, in general everyday activities and more particularly when you're in big trouble and you need lots of help.

You better be there for them is what Paul is telling them. Even little kids can make a difference. Everyone involved, however that looks like and what they can pull off to be helpful to those around them that is of their own in particular and their relatives.

But what in particular and what does this look like? To provide for them. Now you hear the word provide, of course, in English and that's fine. He's obviously going this direction because the context is a widow.

He needs provisions. She literally needs food or housing or something along those lines. But the word at the root often just simply means to think beforehand, to provide ahead of time.

Forethought is what I'm getting at. So providing, of course, is an application of that forethought. You're actually doing something in the concrete, giving her a house, giving her food, giving her a job or whatever the case may be.

But, of course, for our own, that is our relatives as opposed to our households, we don't necessarily do that but you could and I think you should if the opportunity arises if they need it, especially in emergencies again. But typically what you're going to have is you just know about them and you pray about them and you interact with them and you help them. You may give them Christmas gifts.

You may give them birthday gifts and the like. But they don't live with you. Maybe they don't even live in the same neighborhood.

That's typically the case in the American scene, it seems like, more and more. They live out of state. So you can't do much to provide for them other than think ahead and think about them and pray for them.

That's true. And you do what you can. But if there's an emergency, they need help, and you know about it, Paul says do what you can.

Give them some money. Give them some advice. I don't know.

Go out there on their deathbed, perhaps, if you're able and comfort them. Just being friendly for our family, our extended family. And of course, that can only happen if you what? Stay in touch.

Another way of looking at this idea of one's own is that the American populace is experiencing what more and more studies are showing. And the studies only show what the populace tells them. You just ask them the question, they give you an answer.

An epidemic of loneliness. There's an epidemic of loneliness. It's been expanding the last several years.

Part of it, of course, stems from our own isolation, I think, from our own. I don't mean our own household. That's a problem as well.

Divorce and broken homes and the like. But our own being our relatives. And what do we know about them? Do we ever do anything with them? Can we ever do anything with them? Sometimes it's beyond our control, of course.

And if you imagine if you actually had, and we had a society that encouraged, do something with your uncle. Don't have the first thought, when I grow up I'm going to leave my neighborhood, leave my town, leave my state. I don't want to be near anybody I know.

And go off on your own as a default response to things. Again, it's not inherently wrong, but I know certainly I was raised that way. Other people were raised that way.

It's to be expected. And how are we going to fulfill this? To what? Provide or at least have forethought and care and consideration for one's own, one's own relatives. Loneliness would seem to be a natural response to this, but you can overcome that if you have more social contacts.

And the most obvious social contacts, especially when you're young kids, is relatives. Do something. Be a part of their life.

If you can, go on vacation, go visit them once in a while. Something there that we can do. We may need to reevaluate, it seems to me, although how much and to what extent, I cannot answer for you.

How do we relate beyond the immediate family to our own? As the language here is. So, the next point is, the third point, the fifth commandment in the family or the household. Again, in our context, that's usually just the immediate family.

That's how we describe it. With rising divorce rates, growing single family homes, schools and politicians and laws, tearing families apart, a growing population implosion, not enough kids, they're closing schools down here in Jefferson County. We need to get back to, it seems, more and more, something akin to family first and last.

Not in absolute sense, of course, but within God's parameters, as we read here in this text and elsewhere. To reevaluate, again, I speak collectively, not any particular people here or even our denomination. I don't know much about what's going on there, but I know the general trends and I've seen some personal things in this regard.

So, what I mean by family first and last, of course, the qualifiers, is here, immediate family, the household is where daily life takes place, doesn't it? Of course it does. The day starts and ends at home. Whether that's just your spouse or your spouse with kids or maybe just yourself.

And we see each other's goodnesses and badness growing up in your own household. You know this. You know your weaknesses of your parents and their strengths.

We witness all these things and we cover it up with much love. That's what I mean by the family. That's what I mean by family first.

You have them literally there, prioritized by practice and by thought. What's my mom gonna think? What's my spouse gonna think? What are my kids gonna do today? What can I do for my kids today? That's family thinking and that's good and natural and proper. In practice, of

course, as I just already illustrated, time and resources, whatever that involves, money, material aid, cars, houses, all that involved.

Jobs, as a general rule, are for your family. You spend so much time with your family, especially growing up as a kid from that reference point as a parent taking care of the kids. It's the whole gamut.

Kids leave the house. That's part of it too and they're still part of your family but now they start a new family as well. But of course, relatively, if a situation is bad enough, like a car accident in front of your house, I hope you're not like, well, the pastor said family first so they're on your own.

That's not what I mean, obviously. You stop what you're doing, even if you're praying. God's not like, well, gotta be more holy, gotta pray, let the accident people die.

No, you stop the prayer and you go over there and help the person. Right? So there are circumstances in which the outer circle, right, the broader circle of random strangers or whatnot or even community, the situation's bad enough, they need help, you're gonna go help them. But short of that and other layers of complexity, of course, you're spending a lot of time with your family and there's nothing wrong with that and everything good about it, especially, again, rising divorce rates, broken households, people being divided by time and space and fighting each other and breaking down the family.

It affects the church, brothers and sisters. The more broken families there are, it affects the church. So by family first, that's what I mean just by the kind of practice that we already have and do intuitively.

But family last, what I mean by family last as well, that little phrase, family first and last. When all else is said and done, when work is finished and school is done, even if our time and effort is mostly even elsewhere in practice, you have long work hours, 50, 60 hours a week, maybe even 70 sometimes. You may be at home but you're not seeing your family because you're working.

You gotta get that job done. You don't have food on the table or you're at school or a combination of both. So sometimes it's not always time and resources that evidence priorities, does it? We know this.

Like I'd rather not do this, thank you very much, but I gotta work. I'd rather be with my family. But our hearts rest in peace and preciousness is with the family because it's the comfort of a warm shoes, the ease of familiar sound and faces in which we relax in that chair that we've had for the last 10 years.

That's family and that's the safe space that we ought to have and God has provided for us and we ought to provide it for each of our own and our household especially when they're in need. That's how God created us. It's natural.

And of course, if we are able, we help others who need help outside the family, outside of our own relatives, outside of our community, maybe even outside our state. Now the

warning here, of course, is that if there's a conflict between Jesus and family, Jesus first. And following your family insofar as they're doing the right thing and following God especially, you are doing Jesus first because Jesus says take care of your family literally right here first.

But if there's a conflict and the Sabbath is a good example, the Lord's Day is a good test of such a conflict. God has given us six days out of seven to take care of what? Our family, our friends, our community. But sometimes people turn the Lord's Day into what? Family day.

Now it's true in one sense because what? You get up from what? At home, at the house, from your family. You go to church, you come home to what? Your home, your house, your family. So there's family in that sense.

That's true. And that's, of course, not what I'm talking about. What I mean is family day means we don't go to church because it's family day.

We don't spend time with the saints because it's family day. They do that and it's not good. There's a conflict, they got the wrong kind of prioritizing the family first.

That's not what I mean at all. Now there are three implications of this text. There's more because I have another sermon.

Here in particular, first, prepare, or that forethought to provide for the future. The resources that you have, the mindset and understanding of mapping out the future, of course, as best you can for sickness, agedness, and emergencies for yourself, your kids, and your parents, grandparents. Secondly, you should husband your resources for bad times.

That's related to point one. Husband as in protect and bring and gather up because I think bad times are indeed coming for us. Third, provide for the bodily needs and all this, but especially the need of the soul.

Especially the need of the soul. We are called to that end. Paul is an only concern about the widow's bodily concerns here.

He obviously thinks they ought to hear the word of God. They ought to hear the gospel. They ought to go to church.

They ought to get that kind of assistance as well. Spiritual assistance. Speak of Christ to your relatives.

Teach your children the law of God and His gospel. Always keep your eyes on your Heavenly Father who cares for you and your own even when you cannot. Let us go to Him through the blood of Christ and pray right now.

Lord God above, we are brought into the family of God, the church to be sure. Meanwhile, we're also in our biological families. You have so designed at God that this be the case.

There should not be conflict ideally, but there is of course sins and there are limitations. And these limitations as we see here that are not always by sin as Paul puts the limit here. When

it comes to the widows, the family ought to take care of it so that the church is no longer burdened as says in verse 16.

And so God, this reminds us of the kind of mindset Paul had and that we ought to have as well. And I think many of us do. Praise be to God.

Although the world seems to be attacking this with a false ideology, false lies of egalitarianism. We're not all equal in that sense. We have different priorities and our family should be one of the top there of course always under Christ.

Our Lord and Savior, strengthen us we pray and give us more of what we need so that we can take care of our own and especially our household. By the blood of Christ, our Lord and Savior, we pray for His glory that we do these things. Amen.