

Ability¹ to Provide For One's Family (1 Tim 5:3-16): A Surer Sign of Being a True Believer

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Abstract: *Man is the head of his family. He prepares before looking for a partner (wife). This goes a long way to show that the basic truth is that no man marries without proper preparation (Mark 10:6-9) unless he wants to leave like an unbeliever (1 Tim 5:8). It is more the sole responsibility of the head of the family to provide for his family. Whenever he fails in this responsibility, he is worse than an unbeliever (1 Tim 5:5). There is every possibility that Paul does not just mean food, shelter, and money (Matt 6:25), it involves spiritual nourishment of his family. This article affirms that the responsibility of a father towards his family is more than material needs but also involves spiritual and moral necessities. This article argues that if fathers were true to the above, then the majority of family disputes would have been visibly reduced and controlled. The method we intend to use is library research which is mainly the exegetical study of 1 Tim 5:3-8. This article is relevant in our today's communities because we are running short of ideal families.*

Keyword: Ability, Provide, Family, Believer

Introduction:

The community Christ left behind sees herself as the offspring of the Qahal Yahweh of the OT. The membership of Qahal Yahweh of OT is gotten through circumcision whereas membership into the new community (Church) is gotten through baptism. This newly separated group from Judaism sees herself as a family that is made up of the poor and the rich. The poor mostly the widows are part of the responsibility of the community (Acts 6:1-4). Anytime this community fails in this responsibility, she ontologically moves away from her Christ's given responsibility. Hence, a misnomer. This new community avoids anything that might drag her name into the mud.

Furthermore, our natural families are headed by men. The man who is the head of his family prepares before looking for a partner. This goes a long way to show basically that no man marries without proper preparation (Mark 10:6-9) unless he wishes to live like an unbeliever (1 Tim 5:8). It is more his sole responsibility to provide for his family, though life is larger than logic. Whenever he fails in this responsibility, he is worse than an unbeliever. The responsibility a man has towards his family is fundamentally to empower his children for the future. There is every possibility that Paul does not just mean food, shelter, and money (Matt 6:25) instead all things that are needed for healthy living are unified under love, care, and trust. At the demise of the man of the family, it is the children, especially the firstborn son he empowered while alive that take care of others. This article sets out to state that the reason why we have beggars in our streets today is that Christians have forgotten their responsibilities towards members of their households. If they were to take up their responsibilities towards one another again, then the number of beggars in our street would have been drastically reduced. This article, therefore, argues that if Christians were to understand anew and embrace their responsibilities squarely in their families, then the majority of family disputes would have been visibly reduced and controlled. The method we intend to use is library research which is mainly the exegetical study of 1 Tim 5:3-16. The fundamental question this article sets out to unravel is: Why would a Christian who cannot provide for his relatives especially his family be seen as being worse than an unbeliever? This article is relevant in our today's community because our communities are running short of happy families or ideal families where everybody feels at home.

Father as the Head that Provides for Wife and Children

A family in the Christian context most often is made up of a father, a mother, and children (male and female). The father and mother groom these children. If the father dies young i.e. before the maturity of the children, the wife takes full responsibility for the family. But where the male ones especially the firstborn male child have grown, he assists the mother wholly in carrying out the responsibilities associated with family life. Otherwise, close relatives take care of her and her children. This is the ideal thing.

¹In this write up, ability means having the skill or power in sufficient quantity to do the needful. That is, having the means or opportunity to help. It excludes all those who have not the means with which to assist neighbour(s). Those who are worse than the unbelievers therefore, are those who have the means to help but refuse to do something.

This idea is prevalent in both the Old and New Testaments. A woman is referred to as a widow after the demise of her husband. In the mind of the Old and New Testaments, widows are the most vulnerable. But the vulnerability of widows varies; hence some are more vulnerable than others. A widow without children and relatives is most vulnerable. Others without children but with relatives are less vulnerable whereas widows with well-to-do children are not said to be vulnerable at all. Hence, there are real widows. Paul listed Four classes of widows in I Tim 5:1-10 and they are: (a) the widow indeed, who is desolate, trusts in God, and continues in prayer night and day; (b) the widow who has children; (c) the pleasure-seeking widow; (d) the widow entered or enrolled. In this case, she must be up to 60 years of age, diligent in good works, have brought up children, lodged strangers, relieved the afflicted, washed the saints' feet, and must have married only once. Under the Mosaic Law care of the widow especially "widows indeed" and those that have little children were left to relatives, and was one of the duties assigned to the eldest son, who received the birthright.² Just as widows are not neglected in Biblical tradition, everyone that is vulnerable is not abandoned at all. For instance, there is a warning that if anyone should persecute or treat unjustly a widow, or an orphan, or even a stranger, and if the one so unjustly treated calls on God, there is a promise of swift vengeance (Exod. 22:22-24; Psalm 146:9; James 1:27).³

Our bent in this write-up is not actually the care of the widows or who takes care of them. Our bent is the responsibility every Christian family especially the head has towards the members of his household just as we shall be drawing inferences from the responsibility the Church has towards her weak members like the widows, orphans, and strangers and indeed every member (Acts 6:1). It is a fact that worship done while murmuring or grumbling or in an uncontrolled empty stomach may not have the desired effect instead it will attract God's wrath on the one's relatives. This idea opens the way for our topic: "Whoever does not provide for relatives, and especially for family members, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim 5:8).

Understanding the Word "Family"

Etymologically, we have some words that point to the understanding of the English word "family." Such words include the Hebrew word, *bayith*- 'house'. This may signify the family living in the house (1 Chro. 13:14), it can also be translated as 'household' (Gen 18:19; Exod. 1:1); another one is *bet'ab*- 'father's house' and finally, *mishpahah* - 'clan' or 'kindred' (Gen 24:38-41). It has a wilder connotation than our English word Family (Gen 10:31-32). The Greek Language equally has some words that translate the Hebrew words for family and they include, *oikia* (*oikos*) - 'house, home' or 'household' (Luke 19:9; Acts 10:2; 16:31; 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:16). Another Greek word that points to the family is *oikiakos*- 'members of one's family group' (Matt 10:25, 36).⁴ In the Vulgate the word that translates the Hebrew word for the household is *familia*. The word *Patria* was used to identify family lineage and descent from a specific ancestor (Luke 2:4; Acts 3:25; Eph 3:15). Head of a family is called *Pater familias*. Among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria, the word, *beanyi*- 'household relation' introduces anyone as a close brother or sister. From the root words mentioned, it is noteworthy that the relationship between humans starts with the nuclear family, extended family, clan, tribe, and finally, nation. An average person thinks first of all of the needs of his immediate family or nuclear family before thinking of others in that extended order. An Igbo adage says, "A na - ebido n'ulo mara mma we puba ezi"⁵ One can deduce from the above that family is the basic social unit in the world even during the biblical period.⁶ But when the New Testament talks of the Church as a family, her idea goes beyond tongues or even nations, it embraces all people of all nations. New Testament household (family-hood) hinges on the waters of baptism whereas Old Testament household (family-hood) hinges on the descent (blood).

When a Hebrew talks of members of a family they mean all those of the same blood (father, wife/wives, concubines, children, slaves, or retainers, clients, or resident aliens, widowed or expelled daughters and unmarried adult - sons and daughters) in short all that live in a common dwelling (Exod 20:10).⁷ Abraham for instance, circumcised every male of his household, from his son Ishmael to the slaves born in his house and those purchased from foreigners (Gen. 17:23,27). The household of Jacob was also very extensive and numbering about 66 members not counting his son's wives (Gen 46:4-7, 26).⁸ Hence, what OT considers a family is not really what the English word family stands for. It goes beyond that. But it is almost equivalent to what the African traditional family in general and Igbo traditional family in particular stands for.

Family is everything to human beings. An African proverb has it that "One who is outside one's family is like a grasshopper that has lost all its wings." It is in the family that one is armed on how to face the world. Family solidarity in the ancient world was

² Charles F. Pfeiffer, Howard Vos, John Rea (Eds.) *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Pub., 2005) 1803.

³The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha is employed in this work.

⁴ Getz, Gene "Family" in Charles F. Pfeiffer, Howard F. Vos, John Rea, (Eds.) *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Pub., 2005) 590.

⁵ This properly translates the adage, "Charity begins at home"

⁶Robert R. Wilson, "Family" in the *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, India: Theological Pub. , 1994) 302.

⁷Mckenzie, L. John, *Dictionary of the Bible* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2002) 273.

⁸Getz, Gene, 591.

extremely close because the individual depended entirely on one's family for support and protection and life was not conceived as possible outside the family. To touch a bona fide member of a family, extended family, clan, tribe or even nation unjustly is to incur the wrath of one's kinsmen and women.⁹ The situation of the girls held in hostage at Chibok forest comes to mind here.

Bet'ab indicates that family both in ancient Israel and in most African communities is patriarchal in nature. This shows that most of the authority in the nuclear family belonged to the father who exercised legal control over his children, wife, and indeed, his entire household, although this is not absolute (Exod. 21:7-11). During the process of socialization, the eldest son is most often prepared and trained for the future as one who will take over from his father as the next paterfamilias of the extended family. Most often also his inheritance is doubled to facilitate this onerous task. He takes after his father. The firstborn child remains a child as long as his father lives. He does not assume responsibility until his father is either incapacitated by age or at his demise.¹⁰

From the beginning, trades and crafts were hereditary in families. The transmission of these skills and trades most often lies with the father, the paterfamilias. For example, Joab was the father of a family of craftsmen (Chro. 4:14); Mareshah, the father of linen workers (Chro. 4:21); and Cozeba, Joash, and Saraph, the fathers of potters (Chro. 4:23). The priesthood, for instance, is also an outstanding example of a hereditary profession. In the NT, James and John were fishermen, like their father Zebedee (Mark 1:19-20); Jesus also took up Joseph's trade of carpentry (Mark 6:3; Matt 13: 55).¹¹ The aim is to make sure that poverty is eradicated from the household. This is done in such a way that at least one person must be standing in every household so as to carry every other along. Hence, beggars would not make a common sight in any environment where the above is practiced.

Old Testament and Family Responsibility

From creation, nature assigns responsibilities to all creatures. To work and provide for the family is the ontological work given to men and to bear and nurture children was also the ontological work given to women. Irrespective of the dissenting views as regards what happened at creation, this God-given responsibility is to the extent that after the fall, Adam continued to provide for his family (Gen 3:17), and Eve became the bearer and nurturer of children (Gen. 3:16, 20). These God-given responsibilities complement each other. None can exist in isolation. Throughout the OT, the family was considered basic in God's dealings with his people. The fathers are also particularly responsible for the spirituality of his household (Exod. 20:4-5; Num. 14:15). OT customs and traditions paint pictures that portray the paterfamilias as the all in all. The power of the head of a family is quite significant. His responsibilities included begetting, instructing, disciplining, and nurturing. He has a lot to say when it comes to the need of every individual directly under him. For instance, when Abraham was called to leave his father's house to the place the Lord would show him, it was like as if his whole family was equally called (Gen 12:1-9). From a certain angle, the power of a family head seems to be absolute. Abraham had the authority to sacrifice his son without involving Sarah (Gen 22:1). The father could in OT, destroy family members if they enticed him from his loyalty to God (Deut 13:6-10).

The responsibility to take care of family members in OT times hinges on the fact that it is God that provides for everybody. Whatever you have is from God, it is meant not just for you but for all the members of your household and beyond (Lev 25:38). Hence, "The Patriarch's awareness of the Lord's provision as the basis for family giving makes God's command to practice special care and generosity within family communities all the more significant: God's provision was supposed to result in people providing for the needy, especially the needy within their family communities."¹² Boaz knew that Ruth and her mother-in-law were in need, thus he married Ruth so as to provide for her and her mother-in-law and particularly to preserve her husband's lineage (Ruth 4:9-12). Jacob ostensibly showed generosity to Esau even when Esau refuses to collect; Jacob persuaded him for he himself had experienced immensely the graciousness of God (Gen 33:11). Again during the famine, Joseph provided for his brothers and indeed the entire household of his father despite all that did against him (Gen. 45:4-14). The OT law contained provisions mandating family members to help each other recover family lands if such lands were mortgaged to pay off debts, and if no relatives had the means to do so, it would be turned back over to the original owner in the year of Jubilee (Lev 25:35).¹³ That is how the poor and needy were taking care of in the Old Testament times. They fundamentally see each other as sons and daughters of the same household as well as children of God. In all, the generosity of Israelites towards one another stemmed from the generosity of God.

New Testament and Family Responsibility

New Testament goes beyond family, clan, and nation and embraces all the members of Christendom as brothers and sisters and as members of the same family. In both OT and NT, family is the first line of protection against poverty and economic ruin. In 1 Tim 5, Paul makes it clear that if the poor have family, the family is to take care of them. It is only when there is nobody in the family to assist and only when the poor has no work and there is no relation to help that the church can support them. In that case, the church will become a kind of 'kindred redeemer' as Boaz was to Ruth and Naomi.

⁹Mckenzie, 273.

¹⁰Getz, 591

¹¹Jerome H. Neyrey, "Family" Carroll Stuhlmueller (Gen.ed.) *The Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996) 310

¹²Ryan Casselbery.

¹³Anchor Bible Dictionary, 761-762

NT household or family especially the Christian family, had most often one husband, and one wife, children, relatives, slaves, servants, and others who lived there for various reasons. The household codes of the NT outlined duties for the members including husband/wife, fathers/child, and master/slaves (Eph 5:21-6:4; Col 3:18-4:1). The biblical roles for men and women continue from the OT into the NT. Men are meant to lead and lovingly serve their wives (1 Peter 3:7; Eph 5:25). Though men are seen in the NT as leaders, marriage in the NT was based on equality and mutual sharing guided by love (1 Cor. 7:4).¹⁴ In the NT, though blood relationship is not denied as we have said above the significant basis remains the family of faith acquired through the sacrament of Baptism (Matt 10:37; Mark 3:31-35; 7:10; 10:19; Luke 14:26). Hence, believers had everything in common to the extent that no one lacked anything (Acts 4:32,34-35) and there were no beggars among them. The way the early Christians cared for one another is exactly what Paul admired, emulated, commended, and encouraged Timothy to follow (1 Tim 5:8).

Church as a Family Provides for her Children

From its inception, the church has been perceiving itself as a family. In as much as it encourages the maintenance and sustenance of the nuclear family, extended family as well as clan, and tribe, it is tending towards a stand that says, "the waters of baptism are thicker than blood." That is, what unites them in Christ is more fundamental than what ties them in the family. The Apostolic constitution enjoins the bishops: "O bishop, be mindful of the needy both reaching out your helping hand and making provision for them as the steward of God, distributing the offerings reasonably to every one of them, to the widows, the orphans, the friendless and those tried with affliction."¹⁵ What the Church uses in taking care of her numerous poor children come from her other well-to-do children. It has been there from the earliest times of the church (Acts 6:1). There were no beggars among the early Christians, hence, they loved one another.

The Poor Among African Traditional Communities

The family structure as we have in OT times is almost what was obtainable among Africans, especially before the advent of the Colonial Masters. There is also a nuclear family, extended family, clan, tribe, and nation. The largeness of a family among African depends on how rich the family was. So before the advent of Western culture and its influence, Africans are noted for the following traditional values that take care of everybody both the rich and the poor and they included: community fellow feeling, brotherhood, or hospitality. Everyone cares about what happens to one's neighbour. The underlying motive of these cultural values is nothing but communalism. Africans believe in "*Onye aghana nwanne ya*" (everybody should be carried along). Hence, if one is rich, he makes effort to show his brother the way to make it also. For Africans, "A tree does not make a forest." Another adage says, "Go the way that many people go; if you go alone you will have reason to lament."¹⁶ Onwubiko Oliver succinctly puts it this way, "The authentic African is known and identified in, by, and through his community. The community is the custodian of the individual, hence he must go where the community goes."¹⁷ Community controls the way people look at reality.

In Nigeria, it is a fact that before the Nigerian/Biafran war, there were never beggars on the street of the Eastern region of Nigeria including the Southern part of Nigeria but after the war beggars started emerging in these areas. Hence, "Poverty was a foreign concept. This could only be really brought about to the entire community by an adverse climate during a particular season. It never was considered repugnant to ask one's neighbours for help if one was struggling. In almost all instances there was help between individuals, tribes, etc. even in spite of war."¹⁸ This again "explains why a community may have poor people but it may not have beggars. A beggar in this context is someone who is not accommodated in the elastic means of the community's life and resources."¹⁹ Sequel to this, the African community does not tolerate and encourage laziness. You work when others are working. Of course, no sane father would allow his son to waste away in idleness. So OT, NT, and African society all encourage brotherhood and communalism. Brotherhood is also indeed the basis of Christendom. A true African is one who cares, just as a true Christian is one who cares and follows the dictum of Christ, "Love your neighbour as yourself."

Just as we have among Africans, that parents train their children so that the children would take care of them in their old age, is also true of OT and NT cultures. Based on this Plato wrote:

Next comes the honour of loving parents, to whom, as is meet, we have to pay the first and greatest and oldest of debts, considering that all which a man has belongs to those who gave him birth and brought him up, and that he must do all that he can to minister to them; first, in his property; secondly, in his person; and thirdly, in his soul; paying the

¹⁴J. Michael Hester, *www.studylight.org/dictionaries*. 6/10/14

¹⁵"Apostolic Constitution" in William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible, The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Bangalore: Theological Pub., 1977)

¹⁶Davidson B., *The African Genius*, (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press Book, 1969) 31

¹⁷Oliver A. Onwubiko, *African Thought, Religion, and Culture* (Enugu: SAAP Press, 1991) 14.

¹⁸Onwubiko, 15

¹⁹Onwubiko, 15-16

debts due to them for their care and travail which they bestowed upon him of old in the days of his infancy, and which he is now able to pay back to them when they are old and in the extremity of their need.²⁰

The aim of every father or head of a family is to replicate himself in his children and his children would influence their own children to the extent that the family lineage would never be broken.

Exegesis of 1 Tim 5:3-16

The First Letter of St. Paul to Timothy is part of the body of the letter generally referred to as Pastoral Epistles. The body of 1 Timothy divides itself into three main sections: firstly is the first commission of the Apostolic disciple by the Apostle or lengthy church order (1 Tim 1:3-3:13); secondly, the central core of the hymnic, oracular, and prophetic texts (1 Tim 3:14-4:5); and thirdly, the second commission (1 Tim 4:6-6:2). Our text falls within this third section. The majority of scholars refer to it as the teachings of the Apostle for different groups within the church. For this, this section could be divided into six different subsections and they include: (1) Introduction (4:11); (2) Timothy as a Church leader (4:12-16); (3) the leader and various age groups within the church (5:1-2); (4) the leader and the widows (5:3-16); (5) The elders (5:17-25); and, (6) Slaves (6:1-2).²¹

A close study of 1 Tim 5:3-16 indicates that it is a unit that deals with the welfare of widows. Identifying who should be a widow is an exercise aimed at reducing the size or number of widows then so that the meager resources of the church could be enough for those who were "really widows," and reduction of the financial burden on the church as a family.

The unity of the text (1 Tim 5:3-16) could be identified by the *inclusio* made by the word *chēras* in verses (vv) 3 and 16. There is a command to pay the widows by their relations, to enroll them, and a warning on those that should not be enrolled vv 4, 9a, and 16. These verses emphasize that widows are to be paid, and enrolled, and the younger ones should be rejected from being enrolled. Verse 16b reveals the reason why only "real widows" should be taken care of by the church. The widows as we know, are generally those who are bereft of their husbands. But in the context of our text, widows are more than those who are bereft of their husbands. In our context, they are those who have absolutely nobody to run to (husbands, children, nephews, grandchildren, or near relations) except God (Jer. 49:11). A good example of such a widow is Prophetess Anna mentioned in Luke 2:37. She was a widow indeed who departed not from the temple but served God with fasting and prayer, night and day.

The central word which explains what the Apostle wants to be done for the widows is *pronoēi*. A word that was carefully chosen by the Apostle. As was used here, it is a verb indicative, present active indicative, 3rd person singular, it comes from the verb *pronoō* meaning to provide for, have regard for, and respect the widow. It is the keyword that binds the whole text together. It tells us the responsibility of a husband towards his wife and when the husband is not there, it tells us of the responsibility of children (v4) towards their parents, relatives, or the church towards anyone bereft of everything that makes life worth living (v16). The community of the Pastorals was familiar with the institution (of widows who were employed to tend the sick and the aged, to look to them by the direction of the deacons)²² of "enrolled widows", in vv9-10 the author probably cites older regulations regarding their enrollment. Clearly, the author believes that this institution has over-expanded, and he indicates three ways (vv 3-8, 9-15, 16) of limiting its membership to "those who are really widows" (vv 3, 5).²³ Real widows are the ones that really need assistance. A widow without relatives most often is faced with great hardships (1 Kings 17:8-15; 2 Kings 4:1-7)

Since our interest lies not solely on the widows but on the needy generally using the widows as our point of departure; we shall not concern ourselves with the institution of widowhood. Our main focus is to establish theologically that there is a connection between good works done particularly to the members of our household who are in real need and our profession of faith in God through Christ (vv 8,16).²⁴ In 1 Tim 5:3-16, therefore, three categories of widows who need assistance are mentioned, namely, those who do not need assistance from the Church since they have relations to look after them (v4); those who are 'real widows' because they have no one to look after them and whom the Church is obliged to help (vv 3-5, 16); and those who whether helped by the Church or not are called by the Church to fulfill certain official functions. Widows in this third category have to satisfy quite severe regulations (vv 9-15). This article concentrates only on the first two which include the responsibilities of family relatives and the Church as a family towards the needy generally and the widows in particular.

Identification of a True Widow and Their Care (V 3-7)

²⁰William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible, The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Bangalore: Theological Pub., 1977) 107.

²¹Anchor Bible Dictionary, vol. 6 (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 561.

²²Bible-Works-c\program files\bibleworks7.

²³Robert A. Wild, "The Pastoral Letters," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Great Britain: The Batt Press, 1997) 898.

²⁴Hans-Hartmut Schroeder, "1 Timothy" in William R. Farmer, *The International Bible Commentary* (Bangalore: Theological Pubs. 2004) 1817.

The family was the first social structure that God produced. He formed the first family by joining Adam and Eve together as husband and wife (Gen 2:18-24). The man and the woman became the nucleus of a family unit.²⁵ By this arrangement, a man has an obligation towards his wife and vice versa. The father or husband is the main provider of the family. In Biblical times as well as in African traditional society, a man who could not provide adequately for his family was guilty of a serious offense. Such a man is mucked and shunned by society. He is regarded as an irresponsible man (Prov. 6:6-11). Verses 3 and 4 envisage his permanent absence from his family. His absence presents a situation that the Apostle is commanding his Apostolic disciple on how to handle for the good of both the widow and the church as the body of Christ.

No one doubts the value the ancient world and modern world attached to children. They were highly desired (Psalm 127:4-5). Every parent makes sure that children are trained (Prov. 22:6; Deut. 6:7-9). the majority of parents pay much more attention to their firstborn sons than others for the sake of the future. The firstborn sons held a very special place of honour within the family. They were expected to be the next head of the family after the demise of their fathers. A firstborn son was expected to take greater responsibility for his actions and the actions of his brothers. This was why Reuben as the oldest son and brother, showed greater concern for the life of Joseph when his brothers conspired to kill him (Gen 37:21, 29).²⁶ No wonder in biblical times including African traditional society, whenever the father dies, during the sharing of assets and liabilities the firstborn son received a double portion of the family inheritance (Deut 21:17; 2 Chro. 21:2-3) and tackles headlong the problems of the household. The firstborn child no matter how brilliant remains a child as long as the father lives. Jesus was a carpenter after Joseph his foster father, he was a perfect firstborn child and was subject to both Joseph and Mary (Luke 2:51). When Joseph was no longer there, and when Jesus was almost about to leave the world, even when every part of his body was in pain, he still thought of his mother and the obligation he had towards her. Thus he asked John to take care of her, hence, fulfilling his duty of love towards her (John 19:27).

Moreover, just as every child has a responsibility towards his parents, there is also a mutual bond of love between brothers and sisters. No sane man or woman jokes about the welfare of his family. The bond of love between brothers and sisters is very strong, it reduces in intensity as one moves from one's nuclear family to the extended family, to the clan, to the tribe, nation, continent, and world. A good example that comes to mind here is the bond between Joseph and his brother, Benjamin, and then to all his other brothers (Gen 45:14-15). "Blood is thicker than water" is a common African proverb that indicates, no matter what, a brother is a brother. Joseph manifested this when it came to taking care of his family, to save them from famine (Gen 45:5). In ancient Israel, the bond of love between sisters and brothers was so strong that the Mosaic Law allowed even a priest to touch the body of a dead brother, sister, parent, or child (Lev 21:1-3). This was the only time that a priest could touch a dead person and not become ceremonially unclean.²⁷ Igbo adage has it, "*nwanne onye na agba aja egwu oko iku o na ako ya*" (one is ashamed when one's blood relation dances naked in the public.) It is natural to provide for the welfare of blood relations and not to do so is unnatural.

Verse 3 opens with a sort of command, which summarizes the whole content of 1 Tim 5:3-16. Then verse 4 went further to encourage family responsibilities towards the widows. The instruction in v4 is given with the conditional phrase *ei de* (but if) in an attempt to remind children once more of their responsibility towards their widowed mother. This gives us one of the conditions that disqualify a widow from being assisted by the church. If a widow has relatives including children, grandchildren, brothers, and sisters, brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law then his problem could be sorted within the family circle. Having these nominally or literally is not what the text is talking about. The text refers to those who could provide and take care of the widow or the needy. The text also talks of widows that have nothing to do, that is, one without any means of livelihood. It is only when a widow is bereft of all these that the widow becomes one of the responsibilities of the Church. In this verse, the Apostle leaves the determination of a real widow to the description or judgment of the leader of the community. V4 has its foundation in the fifth commandment which admonished all and sundry: "Honour your father and your mother" (Exod. 20:12). The implication is that to honour one's parent is not just charity but an obligation imposed on us as a result of our earthly descent. V5 identifies a true widow. The widow of v6 contrast with the widow of v5. Those that would never be numbered among the widows that fall under the responsibility of the church. V7 provides the reason for this careful selection.

Membership of Widowhood (Vv9-15)

In the above verses, the Apostle carefully and strictly instructs his Apostolic son on who should be enrolled as a widow and who should not. He has the interest of the church at heart. He wanted scandal to be avoided among the enrolled widows.

The Inseparability of Good Works and Faith (Vv 8, 16)

In our submissions above, it is clear that among the ancients, African traditional society, and even among pagans, "Charity begins at home." The emphasis the Apostle wants to draw from the above verses is that unbelievers are affected by the hardship of the

²⁵J.I. Packer and M.C. Tenney (Eds.) *Illustrated Manners and Customs of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1980) 412

²⁶J.I. Packer and M.C. Tenney (Eds.) 414

²⁷J.I. Packer and M.C. Tenney (Eds.) 416

members of their families. What if a believer who should be exemplary in everything does not show mercy even to the members of his family, then he is worse than the unbeliever who does this ordinarily.

In v8 therefore, Paul selected his words very carefully to expatiate the above facts. Just as in v4, he also used the conditional phrase: *ei de* (but if). It is a negative condition that Paul never expected a believer to be part of. *Ou pronoiei* "he provides not" it is present active indicative; *tōn* -article, genitive case. *idiōn* "one's own, private, peculiar to oneself" (Matt 25:15); *kai malista* "and especially", this is an adverb, superlative of comparison; *oikeiōn* "household members, of the household", is an adjective, normally genitive, masculine plural. "If a believer does not provide or give assistance to people especially members of one's household . . ." For the Apostle, the implication is that *ērnētai* (perf. mid. ind.) *tēv pistin* (a noun accusative feminine singular) "he has denied the faith." And indeed he is *cheiron apistou* (genitive of comparison), "worse than an unbeliever."²⁸ That means, an unbeliever is better than any believer who cannot provide for the welfare of his relatives especially members of his own household. This is true as long as he has what it takes to carry on. Paul was not condemning anyone who has nothing to sustain his own life, but he who has and refused to assist his neighbour. He is the one who is worst than an unbeliever.

Paul has enough evidence from the ancient world to affirm that he who does not help or assist anyone in his family that is in need is worse than an unbeliever. For in those old good days, family members lived, worked, farmed, moved, and worshipped the same divinity together. They lived as a unit. Young men did not voluntarily go out on their own in search of their destinies, if it must happen it must be by mutual agreement. The call of Abram and the separation of Abram from Lot come to mind here (Gen 12 and 13). Again, single women did not get their own apartments as is common in Western societies today. Nor were elderly parents placed in nursing homes, infants dropped off at daycare, or teenagers sent off to boarding school. Today, this is to the extent that a child in such daycare or boarding school can easily forget his or her parents as long as he has provisions. There was warmth always from well-to-do members of the household and that was why the absence of one is felt by all. But today a child in a daycare or boarding school rarely thinks of his or her parents unless he runs short of provisions. Gifts sustained each individual and in turn, encouraged each family member to play his role in sustaining the family. Patriarchs preserved the security and prosperity of their families by leaving an inheritance to their children, usually in the form of land or leadership succession. Ascension to a leadership position was natural and hereditary. Such inheritances guaranteed the ability of children to provide for their family, without giving an inheritance, a family leader would doom his family to destitution or dissolution through hunger, internal squabbling, or pillaging by enemies.²⁹

verse 16 provides another angle to the whole idea. Anyone who has and is a believer has the responsibility of providing for the members of his household. The order to assist is not gender-based (vv 8, 16). V16 has a textual problem. Some ancient manuscripts have *pistos* "believing man" but Nestle-Aland and older manuscripts have *pistē*. "believing woman." In spite of the disagreement, we equally know that even in Jesus' own time, and Paul's time, there were wealthy women that provided for their welfare (Rom 16). In our time, there are still such wealthy women, a good example is Princess Oduah's Foundation in Anambra State which has just entertained Anambra widows. She doles out cash to help 2000 widows and they seem to have rediscovered their lost hope.³⁰ So, it is not really something new that some women could also be wealthy. Paul, therefore, urges also wealthy women believers *eparkeitō* (pres. pass. imp.) "to help, to assist." It is a command. A command that aimed at both helping the poor and at the same time reducing the *bareisthō* (pres. pass. imp.) "burden" that is imposed on the church. Paul not only aimed at reducing the plight of the widows or the poor, but also the financial burden the church was carrying as a result of neglect by believing members of various families. For him, hospitality and spreading of the good news go hand in hand (Rom 16). It pays better to be in the home of believers than for a preacher to stay in an inn.³¹

The idea Paul portrays in vv 8 and 16 could be likened to the instruction Jesus gave to his followers urging that "unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:20). The implication is that the Pharisees and Scribes are righteous but not enough to enter the kingdom. In the same way, if ancients are good to one another, how much more would believers be towards one another? It ought to be exceptional and admirable.

The author of 1 Tim. also emphasized that the Church should be the last resort of every poor man or woman. When the poor person has no one again to run to, then he must run to the church.

Recommendations:

(1) Present-day children are mostly left in the hands of nannies, daycare houses, and boarding schools, hence no more cohesions and intimacies between mothers and their children. Men ought to be encouraged once more to assume fully the responsibility of

²⁸Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, 1980) 629

²⁹Ryan Casselberry (library generous-giving.org) 6/10/14.

³⁰Fides Newspaper, October 19-25 Edition, Vol. 22, No. 40 (page 5)

³¹Eric Lane Titus, "The First Letter of Paul to Timothy" in *Interpreter's Concise Commentary, Acts & Paul's Letters* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984) 454

providing for their households as well as training their children both morally and providing them with means of livelihood. Nursing Mothers on their part should not be allowed to work for more than six hours a day.

(2) Daycare should be abolished for children whose parents are still alive and left for real orphans. Again, boarding houses should be abolished for Pre-Nursery pupils up to Junior Secondary three but can be organized for real orphans under the supervision of the church.

(3) Marriage ought to be encouraged among those who have the requisite requirements like skills, employment, and sound judgment acumen.

(4) through Catechesis believers should be made to understand their basic responsibilities towards one another starting from their household down to the church itself.

Evaluation and Conclusion

Those who are capable of assisting the poor in their household but they are not doing that are worse than unbelievers "because non-Christians themselves teach and practice this commonplace virtue" (Rom 2:14; 1 Cor. 5:1; Phil 4:8)³² Hence, Faith without good deeds is dead (James 2:14-26). That is the standard the Apostle wants his Apostolic Son, Timothy to imbibe and teach diligently to his community. A father is the head of the family and the provider of the family. He trains his children in union with his wife in such a way that later in life, they will take care of them (Eph 6:4). Hence, whatever fruit one plants, such is what one will reap. There is a close relationship between deeds and faith in Jesus. None can exist without the other. Faith and deeds are like husband and wife, take one away, then the other is impaired perpetually. If the above is imbibed, then the number of beggars in our street would be greatly reduced.

³²George Arthur Buttrick (Com. Ed) *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1955) 436.