

"THE FIRST EPISTLE TO TIMOTHY"

The Care Of Widows

(1 Tim. 5:3-16)

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PASSAGE

5 Now she who is a widow indeed and who has been left alone, has fixed her hope on God and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day. 6 But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives. 7 Prescribe these things as well, so that they may be above reproach. 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. 9 A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, having been the wife of one man, 10 having a reputation for good works; and if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, and if she has devoted herself to every good work. 11 But refuse to put younger widows on the list, for when they feel sensual desires in disregard of Christ, they want to get married, 12 thus incurring condemnation, because they have set aside their previous pledge. 13 At the same time they also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention. 14 Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach; 15 for some have already turned aside to follow Satan. 16 If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, she must assist them and the church must not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed.

INTRODUCTION

1. In the New Testament church, the care of widows was an important concern, as it was in Israel's economy.
 - a. Early on, the church at Jerusalem made sure none were neglected - Acts 6:1-7
 - b. James described caring for widows as "pure and undefiled religion" – Jas. 1:27
 - c. Paul charged Timothy to "Honor widows who are really widows" and throughout the passage he distinguishes them from other widows - 1Tim. 5:3

“A true widow is not simply a woman whose husband is dead but one who deserves to be supported by the church. The following verses spell out two considerations for determining if a widow is truly deserving of support: she must be totally alone with no means of support (which includes the idea of being elderly and not desiring remarriage), and she must have shown exemplary Christian character throughout her life.” (Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46)

2. Yet it was not a responsibility automatically to be thrust upon the church.
 - a. The local church has some limitations – “*without support,*” “*desolate*” vs. 5, 8
 - b. Family members have primary obligations – “In contrast to true widows (v 3; “but,” is adversative), widows who have families should draw their support from them.” (Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46)
 - c. Even widows themselves bear some responsibility

I. CARE TO BE GIVEN BY THEIR FAMILIES

A. TO SHOW PIETY AT HOME...(in caring for parents)

1. "...let them (children & grandchildren – lit. descendants) first learn to show piety at home" - 1Tim. 5:4
2. "The word is commonly used to denote piety toward God, but it is also used to denote proper reverence and respect for a parent." - Robinson
3. This is one way that children "honor" their parents - cf. Eph. 6:1-2

B. TO REPAY THEIR PARENTS...

1. "and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God" - 1Tim. 5:4
2. Think of the care and sacrifice parents make for their children (*thus make some return*)
3. "This debt can never be wholly repaid, but still a child should feel it a matter of sacred obligation to do as much toward it as possible." - Barnes

C. TO PROFESS TRUE FAITH...

1. Refusal to provide for one's own family is a denial of the faith and true religion - 1Tim. 5:8; Jas. 1:27
2. Even unbelievers care for their own: "Every man should take care of his own family" - Cicero
3. Dare we do any less?

(Families should care for their widows, for "widows indeed" are those who are left alone and trust in God through prayers night and day (1 Tim. 5:5). They are certainly not ones who "live in pleasure" (1Ti 5:6-7), of which Paul will say more later. Next Paul writes of the care given to "widows indeed"...)

II. BY THE CHURCH

A. THEY MAY BE TAKEN "INTO THE NUMBER"...

1. I.e., included on a list of those cared for by the church - 1Ti 5:9; cf. Ac 6:1-7
2. From the qualifications (see below), some conclude these widows would be given special duties to fulfill for the church
3. Since it was not uncommon for the church to provide for its own on special occasions (cf. Ac 4:34-35), this appears to be a list for those given long-term care by the church

B. PROVIDED QUALIFICATIONS WERE MET...

1. Over sixty years old, the reasons for which given later - 1 Tim. 5:9
2. The wife of one man - 1Ti 5:9
 - a. Assumed by many to mean one husband at a time
 - b. Otherwise Paul would later tell younger widows to not marry again and thus disqualify them for any help in the future - cf. 1 Tim. 5:14

4. Well reported for good works - 1Ti 5:10; cf. Dorcas, Ac 9:36-39

“...good works is a description not of what the widows will do but of what they have done.” (Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46)

- a. Brought up children (pos. cared for children, orphans)
- b. Shown hospitality, especially to strangers (hospitality – lit. “lover of strangers”)
- c. Washed the saints' feet (servanthood & humility)
- d. Relieved the afflicted (helps those in need)
- e. Diligently followed every good work (thrown her whole heart into good deeds)

“This description of the godly widow is reminiscent of Anna the widowed prophetess, who “did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day” (Luke 2:37).” (Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46)

(Such qualifications were required because the church does not have the ability to help everyone (cf. 1Ti 5:16). For younger widows especially, Paul writes of the care given to widows...)

III. BY THEMSELVES

A. YOUNGER WIDOWS ARE NOT TO BE ON THIS LIST...

1. The church is not to take younger widows "into the number" - 1 Tim. 5:11; cf. 5:9
 - a. That is, into long term care by the church for her being a widow.
 - b. Though short term care might be provided along with others (Some benevolence still may be appropriate.)
2. Reasons to refuse younger widow
 - a. They may want to remarry, forsaking the commitment expected of those on this list - 1Tim. 5:11-12
 - b. With such youth, energy and time, they could become idle gossips and busybodies, saying and doing things they should not – 1Tim. 5:13; cf. 2 Thes. 3:11; 1Pt. 4:15

B. YOUNGER WIDOWS ARE ENCOURAGED TO REMARRY...

1. This is what Paul "desires", it is his opinion or counsel - 1Tim. 5:14
2. For younger widows to marry, bear children, manage the household - cf. Tit. 2:4-5
3. To give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully - cf. Tit. 2:5,8
4. For some have already turned aside to Satan - 1Tim. 5:15; cf. Phil. 3:18-19

CONCLUSION

1. "The Care Of Widows" should be an important concern for us today...
 - a. Such care is a mark of pure religion
 - b. Such care is an expression of due respect toward those who have done so much
2. The church has many obligations, it cannot afford to become burdened by caring for widows not qualified in these ways - 1Tim. 5:16
 - a. For this reason families must accept their responsibilities
 - b. Younger widows must accept their own responsibility
 - c. Part of the families care may come from the taxes they pay for government assistance, but this should not replace our biblical responsibilities.

For those who are "really widows", left alone, trusting in God, and who meet the qualifications listed in our text, then "The Care Of Widows" is a duty not to be neglected by the Lord's church.

“Paul teaches that the true widow, the widow who should be cared for, must be totally alone, unable to receive any family support, and unwilling to remarry. She must be a godly woman who has set her hope on God, a godliness made evident by her behavior, such as being diligent in her prayers, being faithful to her husband, raising children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping the afflicted, and being truly devoted to a life of good deeds. Also, because the problem in Ephesus involved the younger widows, Paul says that the widow must be at least sixty years old if she is to be enrolled. This does not mean that the church could ignore widows who did not fit these qualifications. It means that the church was not supposed to enter into a formal, lifelong relationship with widows who were not this type of person.” (Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46)