

**1 TIMOTHY**  
**January 8, 2023**

**1 Timothy 5:3-16**

<sup>3</sup> Honor widows who are truly widows. <sup>4</sup> But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God. <sup>5</sup> She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day, <sup>6</sup> but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. <sup>7</sup> Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach. <sup>8</sup> But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

<sup>9</sup> Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, <sup>10</sup> and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work. <sup>11</sup> But refuse to enroll younger widows, for when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry <sup>12</sup> and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith. <sup>13</sup> Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not. <sup>14</sup> So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander. <sup>15</sup> For some have already strayed after Satan. <sup>16</sup> If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows. <sup>1</sup>

*“This is the Word of God” – “Thanks be to God.”*

When is doing good wrong? When is helping actually hurting?

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Ti 5:3–16). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

So, if we were to take a poll today and had this one question on it “Should the church take care of widows?” I imagine that if the only acceptable answers are yes or no, that it would be (or should be) unanimously YES.

Certainly the church is to care for widows. Right?

In the book of James, it states that this is religion that pleases God.

**James 1:27**

**<sup>27</sup> Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. <sup>2</sup>**

Simple, right?

Ministry to widows is a good thing. It’s a right thing. It’s a godly thing and the church should do it.

Thus, over the centuries, programs and registrations and assigned deacons and such has been done in local churches to ensure that the widows in the fellowship are cared for and served well.

Good. Right?

Absolutely.

But...what about when it is not good?

How can a good thing be bad?

The church in Ephesus was discovering this. And it may not be widow ministry, but every single local church from the day of Pentecost has had

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<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jas 1:27). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

moments where good things, good ministries, good ideas and good programs, grew in such a way as to overwhelm and leave the main thing, the primary calling, the God things of the church left undone.

Thus, good things have become bad things when the main things have become lost.

Good may be the enemy of best, but within the church good can even become the enemy's tool for distraction, disunity, and ultimately destruction.

In this section of Paul's first letter to Pastor Timothy, he addresses how the church is to minister to and serve widows within the church family.

And it must be noted that as we have preached through this book for months now, this message about widows does not occur in a vacuum. This is a church with a young pastor who would rather not deal with conflict, especially when there are older people in the church who look down on him, and let him know they do, regarding his age.

This is a church where self-proclaimed doctrinal giants have joined, began teaching, and developed a following, all while teaching doctrine that heretical and built not upon the gospel, but upon myths, misused genealogies, self-promoting theses, and a legalism that left members believing that enjoying the goodness of this world was sinful, that marriage was not godly, that abstinence from good food, good drink, and godly pleasures were anything but.

Thus, there is a congregation gathered under a cloud of confusion and the young pastor Timothy is being mentored by Paul through the Holy Spirit to lead well, shepherd strongly, and excise the false teachers from the family for the sake of the church.

In a culture such as ours where many churches have over-programmed and under-developed, but have packed buildings for years with

pragmatism rather than doctrinally correct, narrowly focused, gospel-driven teachings, to hear Paul tell Timothy to get rid of some members seems so foreign, so out-of-character, even unchristian for many. Thus, when he begins to give details regarding the good ministry to the widows in the faith family, those who have grown up wearing a set of glasses with culturally defined worldview lenses will struggle with the teaching.

Thus, many who say “I believe the Bible” will read portions like this and say “Well...I don’t know if I agree with that.” And that may be the bigger issue revealed here than the fact that some widows will be disqualified from service.

“That ain’t right” philosophy often overwhelms “This is right and true” theology especially when pragmatism reigns.

So, church...be careful here and let’s not skip the hard verses but look at what is being said to the church in Ephesus back in the first century and ultimately what is being said to the church in Orange Park in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **HONOR WIDOWS**

**<sup>3</sup> Honor widows who are truly widows.**

Honor widows – clear instruction for the church. The pastor is given the clear words here that widows are to be honored. Why is this honor right?

Caring for widows is deeply rooted in Jewish and Christian culture. In Old Testament times, widows were set apart for extraordinary care and honor. This is based on the instructions within the law to honor your father and mother.

So, what is this honor? Provision. Protection. Support. It definitely included financial support.

This was clarified in Jesus’s own words as he scolded the Pharisees who created a loophole that enabled them to not provide for their mothers in need.

### **Mark 7:10-13**

**<sup>10</sup> For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ <sup>11</sup> But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, “Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban” ’ (that is, given to God)— <sup>12</sup> then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, <sup>13</sup> thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.” <sup>3</sup>**

Honoring is right. Providing for the welfare of aged widows is godly. In a culture where the church would be the provider of welfare this was non-negotiable. In a culture where widows did not hold the rights of inheritance or position in community, this was vital.

So Paul affirms the church’s actions and that which God had instructed when he states the Holy Spirit’s words here to “Honor widows.”

Yet, there is a caveat – **“<sup>3</sup> Honor widows who are truly widows.”**

Honor is due those to whom it is due, but be on guard. There have been and always will be those who seek good they do not deserve while justifying their self-focused lifestyles. Apparently there are those receiving the welfare, finances, service, and work of the church who are not to do so. Like a church member who never or rarely gives through offerings to the work of the church, so too were these women.

Consumers and users for self, not faithful members of the family. And Paul is calling them out so that Timothy will be fueled to fix the problems. It will be messy and you think people were mad at Timothy

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<sup>3</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#). (2016). (Mk 7:10–13). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

because of his age. Wait until he continues the healthy purge of heretics and changes how the church has done ministry...especially to widows.

In his excellent commentary on 1 Timothy, Andreas Köstenberger reveals Paul's back-and-forth instruction here. First, to do what is right for the widows. Second, to ensure the family of the widow steps up first.

### **FAMILY FIRST**

The general command of God through Paul is to honor and support widows in the church – real widows in the church.

But...it's not the church primarily who must do so. This is the culling down.

**<sup>4</sup> But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God.**

Apparently, the issue of ignoring the aged matriarchs of the family is not just something that has developed in modern times. The teaching is clear – it's the family's responsibility first. If a widow has children and grandchildren...even children who work crazy hours and grandchildren who are busy in school, playing on travel teams, going to dance class, doing cheer competitions, at band camp, and busier than any generation prior are the ones God expects to step up. To not do so makes the busy little more than modern day Pharisees who have created a modern-era "Corban" argument to justify sinful ignoring of responsibilities.

Family is not a one-way timeline that begins with us and moves forward, but also a backward facing timeline that looks to those who gave, served, and raised us. Easy? No. Deserved? Not always. Right? Yes.

In following verses, Paul once more reveals who a "real widow" would be that should receive help. The emphasis on godliness is clear, but the following statement reiterates the family first responsibility.

**<sup>8</sup> But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.**

There are times when distance makes this difficult and the church can help of course.

Family first.

### **REAL WIDOWS**

Not unlike the listing of qualifications for pastors and deacons given earlier in this letter, Paul also gives some bullet points regarding who these widows in the church are who should be served or should be serving.

The details may amaze you, but don't let pragmatism cloud your reading.

Here are the qualifiers for “enrolling widows” as Paul states in vv. 9-10.

- **not less than sixty years of age** – the emphasis is that young widows are not on this list. They will not be ignored, but not served as the older widows will be.
- **having been the wife of one husband** (or literally a one man woman, much like deacons are to be one women men)
- **having a reputation for good works** – she's known for her service in the church and the community. She is like the Proverbs 31 woman you could say. She is not idle. She is not lazy. She is not a user.
- **if she has brought up children** – an idiom that references that if given the blessing of having children, her love and service to her husband and children were known.
- **has shown hospitality** - The word translated hospitable here is only found like this here in the Bible. It refers to her opening her home to traveling Christians and teaching her children to serve and honor other believers.

- **has washed the feet of the saints** – this is an idiom referencing Jesus’s washing of the disciples’ feet. It is to say that this was a service-oriented woman who loved the Lord and his saints.
- **has cared for the afflicted** – having helped others in various types of distress.
- **has devoted herself to every good work** – This is a catch-all phrase used by Paul that emphasizes the deeds and motivations for service.

There’s more. Encouragement from Paul to have younger widows remarry. Seems interesting because in Corinth he said staying single allows for focused service to the Lord. Why this? I think it is because the heretics in the church had so infected the teaching that marriage was considered evil and some of those who should remarry were avoiding it due to false doctrine. The clarity is that laziness and gossip should be addressed and as stated elsewhere, it is not limited to young widows.

### **HONOR THE WIDOWS...AFTER THE FAMILY HAS SERVED**

Some balk at these qualifications, especially nowadays. What about young widows. What about a 59-year-old? What about the young single mom whose husband died? What about...?

Don’t get lost in the weeds and miss the point. Honor widows...who are truly widows and remind family members they have to step up. It is not the local church’s role to do that which the family has been called to do. In relation to widows and in numerous other areas as well.

Good things can keep a church from the God things. Honoring widows is right. It is good. It is needed. But...if all a church does is that which is good in the eyes of the community, the world, and even church members, the main thing may be ignored.