

1 Timothy

I. Introduction

A. **1 Timothy 5:3-16** . . . Honor widows who are widows indeed; [4] but if any widow has children or grandchildren, they must first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God. [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.

B. Pray

II. Godliness in relation to caring for family and church members who cannot care for themselves

A. **Verses 3-16** make up the longest single topic section in **1 Timothy**. Its focus is the Christian form of social security for Christian widows. Its intent is to ensure that Christian widows will not be left destitute who have neither financial means nor family to provide for them.

1. It is possible that upon your first reading of **vs 3-16**, you might think Paul is too harsh in this matter of determining which widows the church would help and who they would not help. After all, Christian love calls us to help anyone in need.
2. However, providing for widows was not a one time or an occasional situation. When the church took on the care of a widow, they became her sole support for the rest of her life. And given the limited resources of any individual church, it would be important to establish who would and who wouldn't receive this level of care.
3. Therefore, this section is dealing with the qualifications for receiving a church supported form of Social Security, and how those who don't qualify are to be dealt with.
 - a. In other words, this portion of scripture is not about helping a needy person or family get enough food for a day or a week, or pay unpaid utility bills for several months. This is about providing food, shelter, and clothing, along with whatever else is necessary to care for a widow from age sixty until her death.
 - b. So once again, given the limited resources of any particular local body of believers, it is only fitting to establish clear guidelines and conditions for meeting such long-term needs.
 - c. And bear in mind, any charity given to someone who isn't truly needy it or who shouldn't need it, is a loss of resources needed to help those who are genuinely needy, or as in this case, are widows indeed.
4. Before moving on, I want to add three more considerations, and one reminder.
 - a. **First**, given that folks live much longer these days than when **1 Timothy** was written, we are in even greater need of clear guidelines and conditions of this nature for helping the needy.
 - b. **Second**, these verses are written to and for Christians, that is, to and for us. Therefore, though our government has taken over many of what were once the Church's charitable responsibilities, we ought to remain diligent and creative in our concern and care for those in true need.
 - c. **Third**, the reality is, churches have a limited amount of resources for helping those in need. Therefore, it is important to establish guidelines and conditions because there are those who at first appear to be in true need, but after working with them awhile it becomes clear they are either lazy, or taking advantage of the help available, or persistently irresponsible and therefore

wasting the help given and therefore unnecessarily limiting what is available for those who are truly needy. (2 stories)

5. With these things in mind, I will comment on each subsequent verse or portion of a verse.
- B. [3] Honor widows who are widows indeed (*defined in vs 5, 9-10*);
1. Based on **vs 3-16**, it appears Paul felt it necessary to confirm the church's duty to care for those widows who had no other means of support. And the church was to give this kind of care in a way that honored the widows, that is, showed them the respect they deserved based on their situation and their contribution to the well-being of the church – as described in **vs 5, & 9-10**.
 2. From here, Paul weaves together an assortment of statements regarding (1) who is and who isn't a widow indeed, (2) how to tell the difference between those who are and those who are not widows indeed, (3) and who should provide care for widows.
- C. [4] but if any widow has children or grandchildren, they must first learn to practice piety (*godly responsibility*) in regard to their own family and to make some return (*recompense, repayment*) to their parents; for this is acceptable (*worthy of a Christian and therefore pleasing to God*) in the sight of God.
1. In other words, before the church takes over the responsibility of caring for a widow, her family (*Christian children, grandchildren*), are to provide for her so the church does not have to bear that responsibility.
 2. The important lesson here is that individual Christians, be they single, or a couple, or extended family members, are to be the **FIRST** to care for their widowed parents and grandparents, and in so doing, **LEARN** such things as godly responsibility, the joy of giving and serving, and the why and how of trusting God in relation to giving this level of care to a family member.
 - a. Surely the church must learn how to provide godly care for the aged among them, but it is also important for individual Christians to learn this in a personal way.
 - b. I believe the word **LEARN** is used because caring for an aged parent or grandparent is a drain on time, energy, emotions, privacy, and financial resources.
 - c. Therefore, given the personal, physical, and financial costs, it is unlikely we would willingly and cheerfully give of ourselves in

this way without learning the godly principles, the truths, and the strength of faith necessary to so do in a willingly cheerful way.

- d. And such learning takes place best in the doing – as we work through and work out how to care with the right attitudes and the behavior that is acceptable to God.
 3. In relation to charity, the Bible speaks about the right kind of attitudes that please God. But it also gives a promise that God will meet our needs as we give to others. This is stated in **2 Corinthians 9:7-8**, “Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. [8] And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that **always** having **all sufficiency** in everything, you may have an abundance **for** every good deed.”
 4. Learning to apply the truths in these two verses may be challenging when caring for a widowed mother or mother-in-law, but it is a God-given path for growth in faith and godliness – a godliness that affects your thinking, beliefs, values, attitudes, words, and behavior.
- D. [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.
1. Here in **vs 5**, Paul begins defining the qualifications for a widow who is a **widow indeed**. Then he completes his list of qualifications in **vs 9-10**.
 2. To summarize all three verses, a **widow indeed** is a woman who is at least sixty years old, committed to remaining single, involved in activities that promote the spiritual well-being of the church, who lived a godly life devoted to family and good works, who has no family or extended family to support her, and who is depending on God to support her the rest of her days on earth.
 3. Before moving on I want to reinforce the message that to be considered a **widow indeed**, godliness during the widow’s life as a Christian was to be considered of equal importance to age and being left with no one to support her. Therefore, though a widow fit the age and neediness qualifications, she was not to be supported if she did not fit the godly requirements as well – which brings us to **vs 6**.
- E. [6] But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives.

1. We cannot be certain what Paul means by the words **wanton pleasure**. However, given that **James 5:5** is the only other place this Greek word is used in the NT, and given that the context of **James 5:5** deals with the rich who have lived a luxurious, self-indulgent life, it seems safe to assume Paul is referring to widows who are focused more on enjoying the pleasures of luxury and easy living than on humbly and sacrificially serving God and the church.
 2. And why does this matter? Because the pursuit of self-indulgence is the antitheses of Christian living – which is to be marked by selfless love in the service of others. Therefore, a self-indulgent widow is already dead to the well-being of the church even though she lives.
- F. [7] Prescribe these things as well (*that is, continue teaching vs 3-6 as the rule for godly living and Christian charity*), so that they may be above reproach.
1. It appears the “they” who are to be taught these things includes (1) the church as a whole – in relation to their practice of charity toward widows, (2) Christian widows themselves, and (3) Christian individuals who have a widow within their own family.
- G. [8] But if anyone does not provide for his own (*extended family members and possibly fellow believers*), and especially for those of his household (*his own father, mother, and siblings*), he has denied the faith and (*though he may still be a Christian, he*) is worse than an unbeliever (*in relation to this issue*).
1. There may be more than two reasons such a Christian is worse than an unbeliever, but I will give only two.
 - a. **First**, the Christian has been taught better and therefore knows better while the unbeliever has an excuse for not knowing better.
 - b. **Second**, according to **Titus 1:16**, the Christian professes to know God, but by not caring for his family, extended family, and fellow church members, he denies God (*which includes denying the will of God and the ways of godliness*), and therefore (*by doing what is ungodly, he*) becomes (*or makes himself*) detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.
 2. Or as James says, faith in God without the accompanying works that faith in God is intended to produce is both useless and dead. Or to put into this context, faith in God without loving care for those in need, and especially for your own family members, is both a useless and dead faith.

- H. [9] A widow is to be put on the list only (1) if she is not less than sixty years old (*60 years old or older*), (2) having been the wife of one man (*married only once*), [10] (3) having a reputation for good works; and (4) if she has brought up children (*no apparent requirement that they become Christians*), (5) if she has shown hospitality to strangers, (6) if she has washed the saints' feet (*served in the various ways women were allowed or expected to serve in the church*), (7) if she has assisted those in distress (*cared for those in dire need such as the homeless, hungry, naked, sick, and prisoners*), and (8) if she has devoted herself to every good work.
- I. [11] But **refuse** to put younger widows (*younger than sixty*) 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.
1. It is common in our time to interpret the words sensual desires as sexual desires. However, these desires, when kept within godly boundaries are not condemned in the Bible – which means there is nothing to condemn about a widow wanting to get married for such a reason.
 2. However, if we allow the context to influence our understanding of the words 'sensual desires' (*note vs 6*), it becomes reasonable to assume Paul is speaking of a younger widows desires to experience a more luxurious, self-indulgent, fleshly exciting life than she would experience if she continued living the conservative, church and service oriented life godly widows were expected to live.
 3. Therefore, the inference is that younger widows would be prone to boredom being confined to serving the church, and when the felt-need for a more exciting life grew strong enough, she would abandon her commitment to God and the church and seek what she believes is the more exciting and satisfying life of a married woman.
 4. To this inference Paul adds that if a younger widow forces herself to remain single and a servant of the church – in spite of her sensual desires, she would likely resort to satisfying those desires by being lazy – in a self-indulgent way, gossiping, and getting involved in conversations that are spiritually unhealthy for her and the church.

- J. [14] Therefore (*Paul says*), I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy (*unbelievers, especially those resistant to Christianity and persecutors*) no occasion for reproach (*to speak against, discredit, condemn Christianity, Christians, and the church*); [15] for some (*some but not all younger widows*) have already turned aside to follow Satan (*see vs 11-13*).
- K. [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.
1. Paul ends this section (**vs 3-16**) with a statement that not just men, but also women of means are to take on the responsibility for the widows in their family – presumably when there is no working man to do so.

III. Conclusion

- A. The question for us is, how do we apply this information to ourselves, as individual Christians, and ourselves as a church?
- B. The simplest and most direct application is the attitude and behavior we Christians are to have toward those in need – generally, in specific cases, and toward our own family members.
- C. Therefore, I will conclude with three scripture passages.
 1. **Exodus 22:21–24**, “You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. [22] You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. [23] If you afflict him at all, and if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry; [24] and My anger will be kindled, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.” (*Promised punishment for failure to care*)
 2. **Deuteronomy 24:19**, “When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.” (*Promised reward for caring*)
 3. **James 1:27**, “Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” (*Godliness defined*)