



“THE MINISTRY TO WIDOWS”

1 Timothy 5:3-8

Theme: *The godly take a special interest in caring for those in need.*

Introduction: One of the first controversies in the early church was the imperfect care provided to widows. In Acts 6, there was a “complaint” that arose from the apparent inequities that existed between the “native Hebrew” widows and the widows that were “Hellenistic” (or from regions outside of Israel). Daily, the church would provide food for these women who had no one else to take care of them. In this way, the church became the answer to the prayer Jesus taught us to pray: “Give us this day our daily bread.”

Such imperfect care of widows remains a perpetual problem in the church. A busy Church can regularly overlook women who are alone. Yet, Paul provides the church with remedial instruction on how a church can ensure that widows are being cared for. Although this specifically addresses the needs of widows, it should be expanded to include all those who are alone and in need. Our text teaches us, “***The godly take a special interest in caring for those in need.***”

- I. **The Attitude toward Widows – 5:3**
- II. **The Assistance of Widows – 5:4, 8**
- III. **The Attributes of Widows – 5:5-7**



I. **THE ATTITUDE TOWARD WIDOWS – 5:3**

A. **The Esteem for Widows**

1. As Paul has exhorted Timothy to concern himself with his integrity and doctrinal purity, God’s primary concern is for the overall health of the Body of Christ.
2. It has been said that a church is only as strong as its weakest member – thus, no person who names Christ as his/her Savior is incidental to the spiritual family, the Church.
3. Paul has informed Timothy that the spirit with which he must defend the church from false teaching is to be one of charity, compassion, honor, and respect.
4. In confronting older men, younger men, older women, and younger women, Timothy must practice the essential virtues of an authentic

spiritual leader.

5. Now Paul addresses the approach to women who have been abandoned alone – whether by the death of one’s spouse, the departure of the husband through separation or divorce, or even the detainment of one’s spouse as a prisoner.
6. When they are to be admonished, it must be with **“honor”** [τιμάω] – a term that causes Paul to launch into a discussion of how a church ought to reach out to widows.
 - a) *This term “honor” means to show high regard for her, to “set a price” on her value.*
 - b) *It speaks to the opposite of indifference or disregard for them, as if they do not matter.*
 - c) *The term speaks of an attitude of respect and monetary demonstration of their value to the church – cp. [v. 17](#) [cognate noun of our verb].*
7. Jesus modeled this kind of concern and honor for widows when He was dying on the cross – cp. [John 19:26-27](#).
8. Throughout the Old Testament, God’s special affection for widows was recorded:
 - a) *God declares Himself to be the advocate for widows – cp. [Psalm 68:5](#).*
 - b) *God ensured the widows would have provision – cp. [Deuteronomy 24:19-21](#).*
 - c) *God promises to bless those who honor widows – [Jeremiah 7:5-7](#).*
 - d) *God punishes those who abuse widows – cp. [Exodus 22:22-24](#).*
 - e) *God defines “pure religion” as concerning oneself with the care of widows – cp. [James 1:27](#).*
9. One of the things we sought to do when our children were little was to challenge them to find a widow at church that morning and talk to them – to find out something interesting about them they would share when they got home from church.

B. The Eligibility of Widows

1. However, not just any widow should be treated with such “honor” – she must be among those **“widows indeed.”**
2. The text reads: “Honor widows as those who are ... widows!”
3. The term **“widow”** [χήρα] – conveys a person who is deprived of the

provisions, protections, and consolations of her husband.¹

4. This term *“truly widows”* or *“widows indeed”* refers to widows who are qualified to receive such *“honor”* because of their reputations, engagement in the church, and so on, as we will see in the following several verses.
5. Not all widows are alone or need assistance – because their families are present, their husbands left them with adequate resources, or they are young enough to remarry, find gainful employment, etc....
6. Nevertheless, any widow should be spiritually comforted and cared for by the church, as should anyone in need.

II. THE ASSISTANCE OF WIDOWS – 5:4, 8

A. The Church’s Obligation

1. The understanding is that the church stands prepared to assist a woman destitute or abandoned by her family.
2. The assumption is that these widows are abandoned because of their commitment to Jesus Christ, and their families are antagonistic to Christ Jesus.
3. Often families, because of sin, selfishness, and shame, develop such animosity toward mothers or grandmothers that they refuse to assist them with their needs.
4. This aberration from godliness is addressed in v. 8.
5. No Christian, let alone widows, should be ignored by the church but cared for spiritually and provided for financially as the needs exist.
 - a) *We’ve cared for a variety of needs that widows have had – both spiritual and physical.*
 - b) *We’ve repaired septic issues, structural issues, accessibility issues, and so on, as various widows have needed care.*
 - c) *When COVID struck, the pastoral staff went to widows’ homes, stood outside their houses, worshipped with them, read Scriptures, and prayed.*
6. We’ve had occasions when a “widow indeed” received a monthly stipend from the church to help provide for her expenses and allowed her to engage in various ministries within the church.

B. The Children’s Obligation

¹ When my father was the Executive Director of IFCA International, my mother, Carol, founded a magazine for widows called Chera Fellowship which provides articles aimed at addressing the peculiar needs of widows.

1. However, Paul informs Timothy that the principal provision for widows needs to come from their families - *“but if a widow has children or grandchildren, they must first learn to practice piety regarding their own family and to make some return to their parents ...”*
2. The church should not be unnecessarily burdened with the care of widows – it ought to come from her family – *“... for this is acceptable in the sight of God.”*
3. *“acceptable” [ἀπόδεκτος]* – describes what is welcome or pleasing to God.
4. However, families who neglect or ignore the need of a parent are denounced by God as demonstrating by their neglect the lack of reality to their spiritual vitality – *“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.”*
5. Since God’s purposes for widows are so explicit, anyone who knows Him knows His particular interest in compassion for widows.
6. Thus, to neglect widows is the display one’s unfamiliarity with God.
 - a) *Daily calls, frequent visits, Access to medical files online, and financial assistance as needed.*
 - b) *Sons particularly have the responsibility to step in for their fathers in being attentive to their mothers - listening to their struggles, encouraging them with kind words, giving gifts on anniversaries, Valentine’s Day, their birthdays, and even hugs and kisses mean so much when they are alone.*
7. Such behavior is a direct violation of God’s heart and thus is described as a condemnation – *“... he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”*
 - a) *“denied the faith” [τὴν πίστιν ἤρνηται]* - refers to refusing to consent to the obligations accompanying the faith.
 - b) *“worse than an unbeliever” [χείρων]* - such conduct is morally “worse” or “more severe” than what is even expected by unbelievers, many of whom care faithfully for their mother/grandmother.
8. This statement should not be interpreted as stating that someone loses salvation if they fail to care for their parent correctly.
9. The responsibility of children is *“... to make some return to their parents” [ἀμοιβή]* or repayment – a reference to a debt owed to the widow for her sacrifice in providing life to them.

10. Whereas the church is not obligated to care for every widow but only for those who qualify, a child or grandchild must care for their mother/grandmother comprehensively.

III. THE ATTRIBUTES OF WIDOWS – 5:5-7

A. She Is Alone

1. Paul now explains what a *“widow indeed”* is – *“Now she is a widow indeed who ... has been left alone.”*
2. Her family has also abandoned her so that no one is stepping up to care for her.
3. *“alone”* [μονόω] – describes a person who is solitary or without anyone to whom to turn for assistance and protection.
4. *A widow can be regularly engaged with people in ministries at church, Bible studies, ladies’ meetings, church assemblies, social engagements, volunteer work, and recreational pursuits, only to return home to an empty house so quiet that the clock ticking sounds obnoxiously loud.*
5. It is possible that she didn’t have children or that her children are pagan and dismissive of her because of her faith.
6. The church should advocate for her – representing the Lord Himself who cares for her.

B. She Is Assured by the Lord

1. Additionally, a *“widow indeed”* is a woman who *“has fixed her hope on God ...”*
2. A *“widow indeed”* has nowhere else to go but to the Lord – He is the One to whom she looks with hope.
3. The specific content of her *“hope”* is that God promises not to abandon the widow, and she looks to Him for provision – *Jeremiah 49:11*.
4. Of course, this also implies that she is a woman who trusts Jesus as her Savior and Lord, engaged in worship, service, and fellowship with the saints of the church.
5. This will be displayed by a woman who refuses to isolate herself in perpetuated mourning but does her part in encouraging her soul through the mean of grace provided by the Lord through the church.

C. She Is Appealing to the Lord

1. Another characteristic of a widow qualified to receive assistance and “honor” from the church is that she is not passive in her hope but actively

calls out to the Lord for His provision – “... **and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day.**”

a) “**entreaties**” [δέησις] – *an urgent request exclusively offered to God for the meeting of a need. This demonstrates that she is not expecting anything from the church but is looking to the Lord to provide however He might choose.*

b) “**prayers**” [προσευχή] – *a term that can include the specific request but is broader and involves the worship and praise of God for His faithfulness.*

2. The phrase “**day and night**” is a Jewish idiom for “constantly” or “at all times” – cp. [1 Thessalonians 5:17](#).
3. This is the humble attitude taught by Christ in the “Disciples’ Prayer” – “Give us this day our daily bread ...”
4. The practice of the presence of God is a significant component in a lonely person’s encouragement – one cannot look to others alone but foremostly encourage one’s heart in the Lord.

D. She Is Above Reproach

1. Additionally, she cannot be a woman “**who gives herself to wanton pleasure**” [σπαταλάω] – “**to indulge oneself beyond the bounds of propriety, live luxuriously/voluptuously.**”²
2. Although the term carries a notion of moral laxity, the context suggests that it also describes careless or frivolous indulgence in luxuries.
3. A woman to be cared for by the church cannot be a person who squanders the support she is provided on luxuries, frivolous purchases, and self-indulgent or sinful pursuits – cp. [James 5:5](#).
4. Like the family members who fail to care for her are “worse than unbelievers,” a woman who squanders the care she does receive is “**dead even while she lives.**”
5. This reference to being “**dead**” ([θνήσκω] – separated) refers to separating oneself from spiritual priorities and living inconsistently with what is expected of those who know Christ.
6. This seems to be one of the significant areas where Timothy is to protect the church's doctrine and rebuke false doctrine – “**Prescribe these things as well, so that they may be above reproach.**”

² William Arndt et al., [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 936.

7. He is to ***“prescribe these things”*** to three groups within the church which picks up the instruction from 1 Timothy 4:11 ...
- a) *The widows to behave circumspectly.*
 - b) *The families to take ownership of caring for parents/grandparents.*
 - c) *The Church to care for “widows indeed.”*

So What?

1. Can you think of a person who is lonely for whom regularly you could be God’s arms of love?
2. Have you sought to care for your parents/grandparents in their hours of need?
3. Women, have you sought to live a life that would bring glory to Jesus Christ and qualify you for the church’s assistance?
4. Sons, what are you doing to replace the absence of male leadership in the life of your widowed mother?

The godly take a special interest in caring for those in need.