

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
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Widows in The Church

1 Timothy 5:3-16

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SermonAudio Blurb: How is a church to care for those who are widows? What is its responsibilities and what is the expectations placed upon individuals with regard to widows? What about widows, how are they to view their situation? These are questions that Paul instructs Timothy to deal with rightly at the church in Ephesus. And they are words that challenge the modern, American church to its very core.

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I. Introduction.

- A. Read 1 Timothy 5:3-16.
- B. This is a very unique section of Scripture. No where else in the New Testament is there instruction regarding the care of widows to this degree.
 1. One thing that stands out in it is the amount of space devoted to this subject. More regarding widows than even the office of elder.
 2. Another observation is that there is the simple reality that the Church requires administrative oversight and standards.
 3. Even though the Church is not an organization *per se* it still requires organization to function in a manner that honors the Lord.. As the Lord instructs even regarding the practice of spiritual gifts in the church, “all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner” (1 Corinthians 14:37).
- C. A basic primer on widows.
 1. God has a unique concern for the helpless and widows would be one of those who need protection.
 - a. With Israel the expectation was very clear, you do not exploit those who are helpless. This would include the poor, the orphan and the widow and the foreign alien.

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- b. “If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks.” (Deuteronomy 15:7-8).
 - c. “You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you afflict him at all, and if he does cry out to Me, **I will surely hear his cry**; and My anger will be kindled, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless (Exodus 22:21-24).
 - d. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation” (Matthew 23:14)
2. God expected His people to make it possible for these people to live.
- a. “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. When you beat your olive tree, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not go over it again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing” (Deuteronomy 24:19-22)
 - b. Notice here though that it was not welfare as we know it today, where they did nothing. Rather, the people were expected to go and harvest that food for themselves. There was a dignity given to them.
3. God connects how His people care for those in need with worship.
- a. 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. (James 1:27)
 - b. Interesting to note that “religion” is in the emphatic position here. It speaks of how we express our devotion to God, our worship.

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- c. A closed heart and hand to those in genuine need both in the Church and outside the Church is a heart closed to God.
- D. With these in mind we need to now consider how widows are to be cared for in the church.

II. Widows in The Church.

- A. In this passage there are basically two big groups of widows discussed:
 - 1. The widow ‘indeed’, whom the church is expected to provide for.
 - 2. All other widows, whom the church is not responsible to care for.
- B. Before discussing these categories, discuss “the list.”
 - 1. In vs 9 we read of this “list.”
 - 2. It is most likely that the Church would maintain records of those who fit the qualifications of a widow indeed.
 - 3. But it also is probable that this list was not merely of those who were to be cared for, but those who served the church in an official capacity.
 - 4. Vss 11-12.
 - a. They have made a pledge but they break it by remarrying.
 - b. Notice also that this is in disregard to Christ (ESV ‘drawn away from’). In some way by remarrying they are turning away from Jesus.
 - c. What apparently was happening was that these women would commit themselves to official service to the church and in return would be provided for by the church.
 - d. And if you had younger women who rashly made a vow to be a servant to the Church and then remarried, she would break that commitment and bring condemnation upon themselves. Very strong language!
 - e. This is why they had very strict qualifications to meet.
 - f. So at the church in Ephesus at least there was a board of elders, a board of deacons and a board of widows indeed. Each of them serving the church in a unique manner.
- C. The widow indeed.
 - 1. Other translations will say ‘truly’ or ‘genuinely’.

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2. The responsibility of the church is to honor those who fall into this category of being a widow indeed.
 - a. Honor here is not speaking merely of showing respect. Most certainly we are not allowed to disrespect the other types of widows.
 - b. It speaks actually to the physical care and provision.
 - (1) It refers to fixing a value on something or someone.
 - (2) In Acts 28:10 we find this used in relation to Paul. He was on the Island of Malta. “they also honored us with many marks of respect; and when we were setting sail, they supplied us with all we needed” (Acts 28:10).
 - (3) In vs 17 it speaks of showing the elder who works hard at preaching and teaching to be given double honor.
 - (4) We see this in a very powerful way in Matthew 15:1ff.
 - (a) Here we see the essence of the heart of the Pharisees. They freak out over a manmade ceremony but teach people how to rob their parents.
 - (b) To honor your parents is to not merely give the appearance of respect, but the reality of respect. You provide for them in their old age.
 - (c) But instead they figured out a way to hide their money from their parents through claiming it was committed to God, it was “corban.”
3. So Paul is saying, provide for these widows. Show your respect for them by giving them assistance. But it is not for any widow, only those who are qualified as widows indeed.
4. So who is a genuine widow? There are nine specific qualifications that need to be present.
 - a. First she is truly alone in this world (5a). There is no one to help her, there is no family.
 - b. Second, she is a godly woman (5b).

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- (1) She is a woman whose hope is fixed firmly upon God alone. This is not some throw-a-way line, she is a woman of faith who is not trying to manipulate her way into your wallet.
 - (2) Instead she is a woman who is casting all of her care upon the Lord. She is looking to Him for her care and provision. She is a woman of prayer.
 - (3) An example that Paul would have in mind would be Anna, “And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers” (Luke 2:36-37).
- c. Third, she is at least sixty (9).
- (1) Why that age and not some other is not given. It just is.
- d. Fourth, she was a faithful wife (9).
- (1) This is the same construct as for the elder and deacon.
 - (2) It is not speaking of only having had one husband; rather it is speaking of her faithfulness to her husband. She was a one man type of woman.
- e. Fifth, she has a reputation of good works (10).
- (1) This is mentioned twice here.
 - (2) This is a woman who has made it her focus to do good for others. She is that type of woman you think of and immediately think of the many good things she has done—that is the reputation she has built.
 - (3) What are they? It doesn't say, but it refers to those things that are helpful, beautiful and useful.
 - (4) I can say this with certainty though, she is others oriented.
- f. Sixth, she was a faithful mother (10).

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- (1) Now this is remarkable because it means that all of her children are dead.
 - (2) I would doubt that if she was unable to have children that she would not be allowed to be on the list.
 - (3) The assumption is that she was able to bear children and that she did not shy away from that role. This would speak much to the current mood in our nation toward children and motherhood.
 - (4) She was not a woman who resented children; rather she embraced that responsibility.
- g. Seventh, she was known for her hospitality (10).
- (1) Her home was open to those in need.
 - (2) Primarily would speak of traveling teachers and preachers of that time but would not be limited to them.
 - (3) She kept a home that was her mission field and center of ministry.
 - (4) She may not be able to go out and preach but she could be a source of provision and comfort to those who did, and therefore sharing in their labors.
- h. Eighth, she was a servant to the Church (10).
- (1) The washing the feet was a simple, humble task that gave refreshment to those who have traveled a long way.
 - (2) It is connected to the hospitality and speaks of a woman who did not merely open her house, but actually served those who stayed there in a very practical way.
- i. Ninth, she was a woman of mercy (10).
- (1) This is a very missional point here. It is outward focused and extends beyond the church itself.
 - (2) She was a worker of mercy, seeking to give comfort and care to anyone who was in a tough situation. They were being overwhelmed and she stepped in to give them some relief.

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5. Impressive requirements! But they are so helpful because they give us a sense of what God expects of women.
 - a. Here we have a basic outline of what every mother is to be training into her daughters. If you ever wondered how to parent that little girl, this is a great place to start.
 - b. But it also becomes the paradigm for women saved later in their life to begin to change their values and actions.
 - c. May the women of Missio rise up to these qualifications!
- D. All other widows.
 1. All other simply were not to be put on this list and they did not receive the formal care from the church.
 - a. One lesson to take from this is that grace does not always give and it is not ungracious to refuse to give.
 - b. It also does not prohibit caring for a widow who does not meet these qualifications, she is simply not going to be recognized as an official “widow indeed.”
 - c. We see this in vs 16 where the church is being burdened with widows that could be cared for by people in the church.
 2. Those widows who have family are to be cared for by their family (4).
 - a. To refuse to care for a widow in your family is simple ungodliness.
 - b. To get a sense of how disgusting this is to the Lord look again at vs 8.
 - (1) It is an actual act of apostasy to not care for her.
 - (2) It is contrary to the Christian faith to not honor them by caring for them and meeting their needs.
 - (3) Listen, it is possible to have sound doctrine, understand the gospel, and yet be an apostate simply by not honoring and caring for your family.
 - (4) In today’s society this is incredibly common, where mothers and fathers are simply dumped in a nursing home where they are left to die.

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- (a) Children waiting only for the inheritance while their parents fade away in loneliness.
- (b) Notice also that there is no discussion of if that parent had been a mean parent or not. You take care of them. Or you are a person who has denied Jesus Christ.
- (5) This means that it would be something the church would discipline and excommunicate over as well.
- c. To care for your parents, especially a widow in your family, is actually an act of worship to the Lord, which is what is meant by it being acceptable in the sight of the Lord.
- d. We are in debt to them, which is found in the phrase ‘....to make some return to them...’ in vs 4.
- 3. Younger widows should remarry (11-15).
 - a. His point is simple, if you take a younger woman who pledges herself to be a servant to the church you potentially put her in a tough situation. If she later desires a husband then she must break her word, which she does not have the right to do.
 - b. Paul is also dealing with the false teachers here, for we learned earlier that they were forbidding marriage, probably putting some women in a no win situation.
 - c. If a younger woman is being provided for by the church then she is given too much time that brings great temptation (13 and 15).
 - d. The protection is to remarry and be busy fulfilling God’s desire for her. You can see here how counter-cultural this is to the typical American today but it is God’s will.
- 4. Wealthy widows need to be very careful (6).
 - a. This verse just shows up suddenly and is a bit perplexing to understand.
 - b. The idea of “wanton pleasure” here is one of luxury.

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- c. It is a woman who is freed from her husband and she sees it as just that, freedom! There is no desire to hear the words of our Lord on this subject.
- d. Instead she pursues pleasure instead of considering her position as a way to serve the Lord and His people.
- e. The result is a heart is falls away from the gospel, looking for her hope and joy in this world instead of the age to come.

III. Conclusion.

- A. There is a lot of material in this passage for each of us to digest and I hope that you will give much thought to this over the next week.
- B. We learn that old age is not the time to party, but it is a time to minister. It is a time to provide wisdom and direction to those who are growing up in the church after you.
- C. Youth is not a time to party either; rather it is a time to prepare for old age. And how seriously you take this will affect you in huge ways in the later years. Many a pang is experienced in old age due to youthful foolishness.
- D. We learn that parents need to take their responsibility seriously in raising up both young men and women. We need parents who wholeheartedly embrace their roles and responsibilities that God instructs us to have.
- E. We learn that how we care for our parents is tightly connected to our actual faith in Jesus Christ. We cannot separate them.
- F. We become challenged to rethink what we are saving for in this life, where we possibly create a situation where our money is so tied up that we are not able to meet the needs of those in need.

Small Group Questions

- What are some practical ways Missio Dei could care for widows in need?
- How do you know if a widow is in real need rather than just not able to enjoy certain things? What is the standard? How do you determine her need?

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- Agree/disagree: The many convalescent homes in America reflect our lack of concern for the aged. Why and how?
- When and how should “honor” of our parents become tangible and material?