

1 Timothy 5:3-8

By
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“Honor widows who are widows indeed; but if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them 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. 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. But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives. Prescribe these things as well, so that they may be above reproach. 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.”

Introduction

This morning, we will talk about a particular portion of 1 Timothy that you might read through too quickly. It is a very long and extensive section from verse 3 of chapter 5, all the way to verse 16 that deals with the idea of widows in the church.

I haven't really thought much about widows in the church. I admit that it's not something that I and probably a good portion of you have given good consideration to and as a result, when you're reading through 1 Timothy—and you're reading through all these wonderful instructions about what it means to be an elder in the church, what it means to root out apostasy, and how to be careful about the teachings of different individuals and to understand the centrality of the gospel, and to think about godliness and what it means to actually live out the godliness that the Scriptures would have us live out in the eyes of the world, as well as the reputation of God—and you think of all these wonderful things, and you get to this section in 1 Timothy 5 where it talks about the widows you've got to take care of, you almost think, “How odd is this, that Paul would spend such a long section of this letter to deal with the idea of the care of widows.” It just seems too odd for us.

I've got to tell you, I do look forward to the preaching of the Word, but there are times when certain passages of Scripture are either baffling to me or require such work in the text itself that sometimes I say to myself, “Man, I wish someone else would preach this particular portion.” And that's how I originally or initially approached this portion of Scripture because I thought, “What does the care of widows have to do with us today? We're in a totally different situation. Most widows are taken care of already. And why is there such a large portion of Scripture to deal with that?” It's because God cares about widows.

In fact, we're teaching today just verses 3 to 8 in talking about the care of widows and next week we'll deal with verses 9 to 16 where we'll look particularly at their ministry; at the qualification of their ministry. What we'll see then is that everyone has a component in the church. Everyone has a part that they play in the church and the family of God. The church is to take care of its own and that means each one of you has a role in caring for the rest of the family. That's what this portion of Scripture will teach us—that we need to care for those need our care and who God, Himself, cares about. So let's pray that God would open our eyes to this portion of Scripture this morning.

Heavenly Father,

As we come before You, we again thank You and acknowledge Your goodness to us. You give us all things pertaining to life and godliness.

Lord, we trust in You. Even in the Scriptures, You have commanded widows and orphans to trust in You. You've commanded that because that would be the right Person to trust because there is no One more trustworthy, no One more gracious, no One that knows better of the things human beings need than You, Lord.

And so Lord, if You entrust that to our care, that we are to raise our little ones in the fear and admiration of the Lord, that we would admonish our brothers and sisters to walk in the pattern set before them in the Word, if we are to encourage our mothers and fathers, Lord, to go out and do the work of the Lord in ministry; and in all of these things Lord, help us to understand that You've given to

us the charge to represent You, to represent Your compassion, Your grace and Your love so that the church might stand for what it is, that we might actually be and live out that title of the family of God, that we might demonstrate ourselves in our ministries, Lord as the hands of Jesus Christ and His compassion to the world.

So Lord, as we consider these things that are set before us this morning, we thank You for the Scriptures and how You emphasize even those things that we might forget to emphasize—the ministry of care and the caretaking of those that need our care, especially amongst the fellow brothers and sisters in Christ that we have here.

So Lord, as a young church help us not to feel that things are so distant from us that they are not applicable, but instead, help us to see with new eyes and appreciation the grace of our God in giving us the Word so that we might be wise before those days come.

We give You praise and ask that You would honor this morning and may it be used unto Your glory.

*In Jesus' Name,
Amen.*

The Command to Care for Widows (v. 3)

“Honor widows who are widows indeed;”

In our English, when we think of the term “**widows**,” we often think of it in very particular terms; specifically “a wife that no longer has a husband because he is deceased; a wife whose husband has died.” In the Greek however, the term for “**widow**” or *chéra* (χήρα) is derived from a term that means “to be bereft of, to be abandoned by” or “to be left, aside from.” The idea here is that a “**widow**” is any lady that has been left without any means, without any support, without anybody to aid her. Technically, it refers to a woman whose husband has passed away, but it doesn’t necessarily have to mean that; which explains why this entire section delves into what it is a widow in the church and how the church needs to take care of widows.

It may seem odd to us in the twentieth century to think about the care of the widows in the church, but we are called to do just that; to the same extent that we’re supposed to take care of the orphans in the church; just as we’re supposed to take care of all of those whose care we are entrusted with. For instance, we would all find it ridiculous if someone had a child and they decided to just neglect that little baby. How preposterous would it be for someone to get tired of taking care of an infant and then decides to just stop caring for that baby? That would be ridiculous! We often forget that we ought to care for one another in the family of Christ to the same extent that we care for our own families. The church is to (by reputation) demonstrate the attitude of God by its actions.

I don’t know if you ever thought about that, but oftentimes in the Old Testament, when God speaks His judgment against Israel, it is often because they dishonored Him (and His reputation) in the eyes of the nations. I don’t know if you ever realized that when you’re reading the Old Testament (especially through the prophets), but God has a particular attitude toward the nation of Israel because they are *His* nation and He gets upset at them and judges them because they bring Him disrepute among the world. Their attitude and their approach to life no longer represent Him well. In fact, they become the opposite of that. They bring disdain upon the reputation of God, Himself. This is a constant thematic concept of His judgment against Israel.

That’s Paul’s whole point. We may ask, “Why does Paul bring into this discussion all of these verses? I don’t need thirteen verses to care and identify widows.” Apparently, we do because God in His sovereignty through the Holy Spirit has inspired these very words for *us*; for this church. We may not have a widow among us yet, but we are to be prepared for that. We are to know what it is to have a widow and to care for her in much the same way a parent is expected to care for their children because that is part of what the family of God does.

Caring for Widows: An Extension of God’s Character (Selected Scripture)

When it talks in the Scriptures about caring for widows, it is not an unusual concept. In fact, it is an extension of God’s character. Here are a few select passages that talk about God and His care for widows and for those that can’t care for themselves. Understand that at this time in history, widows were completely helpless. They had nothing going for them. If they were widows without any extended family, without extended friends, with no community, they usually needed to beg (or worse) for their sustenance until they died. If you were an orphan, you also had to become a beggar or a thief or worse. You had few choices: either a life of begging and/or sin or die of starvation. You had very few options. You just couldn’t get a job at the local drug store. You couldn’t just get a job helping people out doing stuff for them. These things weren’t available. When you were destitute, you were really destitute! That’s what we’re talking about when we’re talking about widows.

Let’s look at some verses that deal with the idea of God’s care for widows:

- In [Psalm 68:5](#), God is called, “*A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows, Is God in His holy habitation.*”
- [Exodus 22:22-24](#) says, “*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.*” That right there (you don’t need to look at a lot of other verses) is an intense thing that God is on record saying, “Let Me give you a very solemn threat.” This is a divine threat. The Lord says to us, “You want to afflict widows and orphans? I promise you this, if they cry out to Me, I will come and I will kill you and I will make sure your children are orphans. I will make sure your wife is a widow.” God is not messing around when He talks about those that are helpless. He is the comforter of those that have nothing else.
- [Deuteronomy 27:19](#) says, “*Cursed is he who distorts the justice due an alien, orphan, and widow. And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’*”
- In [Isaiah 1:17](#), God says, “*Learn to do good; Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless; Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow.*” He sees that as part of the ministry of all those that call themselves of faith.
- [Psalm 146:9](#) says, “*The LORD protects the strangers; He supports the fatherless and the widow; But He thwarts the way of the wicked.*”
- [James 1:27](#) says, “*This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*” We understand that second part, “*to keep ourselves unstained by the world.*” We need to live in sanctification. But we sometimes forget that first part—that we are to visit orphans and widows. That term for “visit” means “to go minister to.” It doesn’t mean to go knock and say, “Hey, how are you doing old lady?”, and then take off. It means to actually go and actually minister to them in much the same way the word is used to talk about doctors who come and visit someone who is sick. He doesn’t just come and see how they’re doing. He actually comes and ministers to them.

The idea of the care of widows is significant because it portrays characteristics of God; He’s the Father to the fatherless and the Defender and Avenger of widows. He cares for those who can’t take care of themselves. What a delight that ought to be to us and it is our privilege to care for those that are in need, as well.

Deuteronomy 25 describes the Law of the Levirate marriage. Do you know what that is? It’s an Old Testament law that ensures that widows are cared for. It states that said if a husband dies, then the unmarried brother-in-law needs to marry the widow to ensure that she is taken care of. The idea of the levirate marriage (i.e. caring for widows) intrudes on our idea of romance. You may say, “Well, that’s not very romantic. I mean, come on, doesn’t the brother-in-law want to sweep the lady off her feet?” God is not concerned about that. But, He *is* concerned about how the widow needs to be cared for.

Do you remember the story of Ruth and Boaz? Why was Boaz the kinsman-redeemer? It meant that when they went down the line of her extended family through her ex-husband, everyone was married off. In fact, all his brothers were dead and they go down the line through the cousins and finally they get to Boaz, who was unmarried and he was willing to redeem her. And what an interesting and beautiful illustration of redemption pictured through Boaz and Ruth that is mirrored curiously enough in the New Testament, with Christ being the bridegroom and the church being His bride; that He actually comes around and redeems her, all of us, to Himself.

This isn’t a small thing. This is central to the person of God. He cares about these things. That fact that we don’t, speaks to our shame. It speaks to the fact we’ve lost our sense of propriety as far as our parents are concerned. For instance, toward the end of 2 Timothy, you have this list of all these horrible people in the last days and the one of them mixed in with murderers, fornicators, one of the things listed is that they are disobedient to parents. In God’s eyes, our inability to care for and to interact with and to love our parents is a demonstration of wickedness, not of sanctification.

A lot of you guys haven’t heard my full testimony. When I was in high school, I wasn’t a believer, but I had kind of grown up in the church. I could answer people about different things of the faith, but in high school I completely stopped going to church. I got to a point in my life where I was so reckless, I really disliked my parents. Now, I don’t mean that we didn’t get along. We argued—that’s normal. But, I really disliked them. I didn’t want to spend any time with them. I wished they would go away, that they wouldn’t bother me; that they would just die. I remember saying that out loud and that’s how bad it was. But, once I got saved in my freshman year of college, I realized that my attitude towards my parents was not just inappropriate, it was absolute sin against the honor of the living God.

He (who is my Heavenly Father) was willing to accept me, the rebel. I needed to honor Him. So, do I need to honor my parents? Of course! It’s the fifth commandment (i.e. to honor our fathers and mothers). It is repeated throughout Scriptures, the Lord, Himself, talks about it—that we ought to honor them. Even Paul in Ephesians 6:1 says, “*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.*” There is this constant dialogue of our care and our proper relationship with our parents. Why? Because the family is the social unit that God created to illustrate to us His relationship to Himself.

Why would God call Himself “Heavenly Father?” That’s ridiculous, right? He’s not our father. We don’t treat Him like our earthly father. Why would He call Himself that? Why does He call us His children? It’s because that’s familial—that family-

like relationship; this is the beginning point of how we understand our relationship with Him and what He stands for in us. That's the beauty of this idea of taking care of those that are indeed orphans and widows.

“Honor widows who are widows indeed.”

It literally says, “Widows that are indeed truly widows; honor them.” And this term for “honor,” *timao* (τιμάω) is where we get the name Timothy. It means “someone who is of honor.” This idea of honor, we think of it as honor always going with reverence, respect and that's it. The Greek term *timao* refers to honor in the sense that you would not only respect and appreciate them, but that you would also demonstrate that respect materially. In fact, sometimes it can be translated to mean “to set a price on” or “to assist materially.” This is most likely the idea that will come up later in chapter 5 when it talks about how elders that teach are worthy of double honor.

I don't think that it means that you just double up your respect for them. The idea is that they are worthy of a wage that is double. That would be the more acceptable translation. So this term for “honor” literally means “to give” or “to care for;” sometimes in material assistance. This is exactly the way Jesus used it in Matthew 15. Remember that story about the Pharisees and the scribes that come to Jesus?

*“Then some Pharisees and scribes *came to Jesus from Jerusalem, saying, “Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.” And He answered and said to them, “And why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?” For God said, ‘HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER,’ and, ‘HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, LET HIM BE PUT TO DEATH.’ “But you say, ‘Whoever shall say to his father or mother, “Anything of mine you might have been helped by has been given to God,”’ (Matthew 15:1-5)*

The Pharisees were saying, “Why aren't your disciples going through the tradition of the elders?” Jesus replied, “Why don't you ask yourselves, ‘Why do you break the commandment of God for your traditions?’” He goes on to use this as His illustration: *“For God said, ‘HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER,’ and, ‘HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, LET HIM BE PUT TO DEATH.’ “But you say, ‘Whoever shall say to his father or mother, “Anything of mine you might have been helped by has been given to God,”’*

The phrase *“has been given to God,”* is known as Corban. You've probably heard that at one point or another. It is the Corban oath. It allows someone from that time to say, “I have this car. It's a nice Ferrari. It's very nice. I enjoy it. But my mom and dad keep hasseling me to sell it and give them stuff and to take care of them. I'm going to set this as a Corban (i.e. set aside for the service of God). It is now consecrated for a service. And by doing that for His service, then the parents have no right to it and even the synagogue officials agree with me. And eventually when my parents pass away, then I remove the Corban label and I'm going to start using it again.”

Believe it or not, these horrible sons and daughters were doing that to their parents! Jesus said this about what the Pharisees and scribes said: *““But you say, ‘Whoever shall say to his father or mother, “Anything of mine you might have been helped by has been given to God, “he is not to honor his father or his mother.’ And thus you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. (Matthew 15:5-6).* Clearly, Jesus understood the fifth commandment to honor thy father and mother to include the idea of material help—because that's exactly the illustration He used.

They broke the law because of their tradition by withholding that which could help their moms and dads. He said that that's wickedness, that's wrong, that's not appropriate. In fact, that's something we have to consider carefully because as our parents get older (and certainly they will), the care of them is something the Lord cares about. It displays to the world and to one another, who we are and who believe God to be and what kind of Father our God is and what kind of children we are in Him and what kind of children we are to our earthly parents.

So, Paul is instructing Timothy about how to interact with people when you have to reprove them: To older men, appeal to them as a father; to younger men, as brothers; to older women, as mothers; to younger women, as sisters. Then, he comes to this point and says, **“Honor widows who are widows indeed.”**

Care for and Identification of True Widows (vv. 4-5)

“but if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them 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. 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.”

It is not the obligation of the church to take care of just any woman just because their husband died. In fact, we get a series of statements that describe for us who were considered truly widows. The church is obligated to care of those women. And I tell you what, our church will take care of those women. Why? Because that is what's right and that is what's commanded in the word of God. We need to care about that.

These verses tell us that the genuine or true widow is one who is truly alone. Verse 5 says she who is a widow indeed is one who has been left alone. It's that term "alone" in the Greek is *μονοσ* (μονόσω) which is where we get our word "mono—" from, "by ourselves." She is on her own. And verse 4 tells us who is primarily responsible for the care of such a widow—her family. In fact, the way that the Scriptures tell us, if any widow has children or grandchildren, these are to first learn to practice piety. That term for "piety" is a term that we seem to run across over and over again at different portions in the writing of 1 Timothy. It's that term *eusebeō* (εὐσεβέω) used as a verb *eusebeon*. It's this idea of godliness, this reverence toward the living God.

It's not just a sense of godliness because all too often we toss that term around loosely and say things like, "That person's very godly." And what we really mean is that that person's disciplined. It's incorrect. If we mean that they are godly, we ought to mean that there is this reverence to their lives that compels them to do what is honoring to the living God. That is what that term means.

Primary Responsibility for the Care of Widows—A Widow's Family (v. 4)

"But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them 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."

And so here, he's saying that if a widow is a true widow, she is alone. Only then is she a true widow. But, if **she "has children or grandchildren,"** Paul says to Timothy, you've got to encourage them; you've got to exhort them to "**first learn to practice piety in regards to their own family**" (i.e. widows). We need to take care of our own families.

I know there are a lot of married couples in this room and every time married couples talk about in-law issues, the more difficult and touchy that issue becomes. But guys, Scripture is clear on this that a family needs to take care of its own family and we need to take care of those that are widows.

And he goes on to say they need "**to make some return to their parents.**" God is literally saying there needs to be some payback for all that your mothers and fathers have gone through to provide for your needs. We have young parents in this room and I know that every one of them (I know it was true for me) never understood their parents' love until they have their own kids. You'll understand it from a distance because you'll hear about it; you think about it. But when you have your first child, that's when you start to think that this is not just precious, but almost walk in fear.

We fear of what may happen to this child if it does not grow up in grace and know who the living God is. We fear what could happen to this child because the world is a wicked place. And with all that, this sense of love, this overflowing sense of commitment and responsibility becomes suddenly clear and you finally appreciate (more than you ever might have otherwise) what your mom and dad had done for you and how they loved and cared for you. The Lord is literally saying "Make some return on their investment into you. Take care of them because they took care of you." This is appropriate and right.

In fact, the Scriptures says that "**this is acceptable in the sight of God.**" If you look in other places like in [Ephesians 6:1](#), it says, "*Obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.*" In other words, this is appropriate for us—to return honor by obedience. Here, it is saying it is appropriate to give honor in terms of material care for them because it is acceptable in the sight of God.

This term for "**acceptable**" is a good one. It is *apodektos* (ἀπόδεκτος) which means "it is right," but with an added dimension of "it is pleasing to God." God will be very pleased with you if you cared for your mom and dad because that's what He expects of you if you call yourself a Christian. You may say, "Well, you don't know my mom and dad." And I could counter, "You don't know *my* mom and dad." We can go back and forth with each other about that all we want but family is family and the last time I checked, none of us are perfect. Our parents may have as many flaws as we have, perhaps more. I know my dad would sometimes drive me nuts. My mom (who is with the Lord now) and I would sometimes argue about the craziest things. Family is family. We are to care for them because that's what is acceptable and pleasing to our God.

Godly Widows are Alone but Spiritually Alive (v. 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."

A true widow is a widow who is all alone. Here, Paul is saying the church is charged to take care of anyone whose husband has died that have no extended family; who have no one else to turn to. These are the widows that we have to take care. We cannot abandon our own. This is the family of Christ. True widows are those that are genuinely alone in this world, who have been left alone.

Not only are true widows those who have "**been left alone,**" but it also tells us that they are spiritually alive. They are Christians that are part of a gathering, a community of believers. It says in verse 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.**"

What Paul is talking about here is that a true widow is one that is genuinely alone is alone, yet she should still demonstrate her faith and her godliness, depending upon God and God alone.

It reminds me of that story of the widow with two mites (Luke 21:2). Jesus says that they're at the Temple and people are throwing in their bags of money and there is this widow who throws in two mites. Two mites are such a small amount, it wouldn't be that dissimilar to say that she dropped in two pennies. It's not quite enough to buy her a meal or anything for that matter. You might argue that she offered the mites since there was nothing else she could do with them. She's got two pennies, what else is she going to do with that? But, the Lord says she is most worthy of honor because she gave (in her poverty) to the things of the Lord. Even though she didn't have anything, she gave everything to the Lord.

So, the Lord says here that she is a widow indeed who is left alone, but **“has fixed her hope on God.”** Now, I believe that it is saying that she has *already* put her hope in God. In fact, **“has fixed”** or **elpizo** (ἐλπίζω) is in the perfect tense. In the Greek, the perfect tense means that it is a stated reality here and it continues on until even today. It carries the idea of a completed or perfected action. She has already put her hope in the living God and that's the state she remains in today. It's a beautiful expression that conveys to us not only that she has trusted in Christ for salvation, but that she continues to depend on God and God alone for everything that she needs.

This is a godly woman. She's not clamoring for the church's help. She is not looking for a handout from the church. She is literally someone that is seeking in prayer the sustenance she needs from the Lord and awaiting the day she goes to be with Him. That's why the term **“hope”** is more appropriate here in this wonderful way of writing this statement of faith.

She has her hope already fixed. She is old, aging, or maybe ill. She knows her days are numbered and that's acceptable to her because her hope has been fixed upon the person of Jesus Christ and the person of God, the living God who will rescue her from this life. She's alright with it. And if she should die tomorrow, she will die tomorrow. She is glad for it because she knows her God. She has fixed her hope on God **“and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day.”**

She is a woman of prayer and **“continues in entreaties and prayers night and day.”** Notice the use of the phrase **“night and day?”** It's an inversion of our English where we say, “I've been working day and night.” To the Jew, it was always night and day because the Sabbath began on Friday at sundown. That's when the Sabbath begins and it goes all the way to sundown on Saturday. So it begins at night and lasts through the day. It suggests she is a woman of great piety and she commits herself to seeking the Lord for all things and that she is in entreaties and in prayers. It is not to say that she is just praying for herself, but rather it is implying that she is a warrior for prayer. What church doesn't need women and godly saints like that? She is an example of true faith. She is spiritually alive.

The Worldly Widow is Spiritually Dead (v. 6)

“... But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives.”

Now contrast the idea of a spiritually alive widow to a spiritually dead one. **“But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives.”** That's an extraordinarily strong statement. It contrasts the true widow who has put her hope in God, who remains and continues in prayer and in seeking the Lord's will in this life to the widow who Paul says is spiritually dead. She is **“dead even while she lives”** signifies that although she may be physically alive, her heart and her soul is dead.

How curious is the issue of this deadness that is demonstrated in **“wanton pleasure.”** We always talk about this idea of pleasure and of leisure. Living it up and living large. We talk about living as our euphemism for good, luxurious, excellent enjoyable things in life. But here, Paul is saying (through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) wanton pleasure is luxurious living while spiritually dead. The term for **“wanton pleasure”** or **spatalao** (σπατάλω) often can be used for “this idea of the sensual pleasure of delight, of having this sexual desire” and it might mean that, but I don't think that's the point here. Later on, ideas like that will be addressed by Paul, but I think in this context, the idea of wanton pleasure simply means that kind of lifestyle that is indulgent and that is about pleasing ourselves and that's it. The same word is used in James 5:5.

“You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.” (James 5:5)

As James is often ought to do, he paints a very vivid picture for us. He's saying, “You know what? You have fattened yourself up for the day of slaughter like a pig because you've lived luxuriously on the earth and you've lived a life of wanton pleasure.”

The term “luxuriously” there means “comfortable.” It literally can be translated it there as “softly.” You've lived a cushy life and the second part is it's a life of wanton pleasure; luxuriously, indulgently—you're a pleasure seeker. Paul says true widows are those that are not only alone, they are spiritually alive and their lives are a contrast to the life of leisure.

I think that there's a disconnect for most of us American Christians, who have more than we need, who have excess. Sometimes, we go to Costco to buy milk and buy like \$300 worth of goods. We have plenty in our lives to eat and enjoy.

God is not against that. I am not here to preach to you that you should live like monks or that we should give away all our goods, etc. That's not the point. The point is that spiritual vitality is frequently contrasted to material luxury in Scripture.

It is difficult, no it is impossible, for a rich man to come into the kingdom of God. If we consider that carefully, then we ought to understand that if we are so fixated on luxury and leisure and on just the delights of indulgence, we got to be careful that our hearts have not made that our god instead of the true living God.

He is honoring widows who are widows indeed. They are impoverished. They have no one. They are alone—emphasis is on alone. And yet here they are, night and day in prayer for the saints, for the church, for the glory of Jesus Christ. These are godly women. He says now contrast that to those who are dead. They're just in their wanton pleasure. They're living luxuriously, enjoying life. Those aren't widows. They're not godly widows. They're not widows that the church is prescribed to care for.

Honoring Widows Helps us to be Above Reproach (v. 7)

“Prescribe these things as well, so that they may be above reproach.”

Paul tells Timothy that we need to honor and care for widows that are widows indeed. He says to **“prescribe these things.”** Not just to honor them, but to teach others to honor them, as well. **“Above reproach”** is a very significant concept, especially in 1 Timothy. For example, in 1 Timothy 3, the elder and the bishop is to be above reproach. The deacons are to be blameless, as well. There is a sense in which being above reproach is important for those who are leaders in the church. Why? Because it is not enough for us to have just good people in leadership in the church. No, it's beyond that. They need to be above reproach so that if anybody was to see the conduct of those that call themselves Christians, they ought to be amazed by it. They ought to be shocked by it. They ought to sense that there is something to God that is kind of amazing and if grace ceases to be amazing, it's because we have deadened people's sensitivity to the goodness of God.

I remember when I was an undergrad at UCLA, there was a particular professor who was a crazy dude. In fact, I didn't know he was the professor on the first day of class because when he walked in, he had a Grateful Dead jacket on and he looks all crazy and he's fixing some stuff up. I thought he was the AV guy. But he turns around and introduces himself as the professor.

We're going through Western Civilization and talking about all these important things that have happened and we get to this one point where he says, “At this point in the Roman society, something happens. Someone comes on the scene that changes all of civilization. Do you know who that is?” So ,I offered up my answer and said, “Is it Jesus Christ?” He says, “Yeah.” And he reads through the Gospel of John, Chapter 1. It was crazy. I was sitting there and here was this crazy professor who as soon as he finishes reading about the incarnation of Christ in John 1 says, “Now, you guys know I'm not a Christian...” Then, he starts cursing about Christianity. “I'm not one of those” he says, “but you've got to admit there's got to be something remarkable to this idea that God comes to die, to pay the price that you can't pay. You got to admit there's something remarkable about that, but too bad these bleeping Christians never live up to that!”

You see, even unbelievers recognize something to the reputation of God if you live rightly. And so when Paul says, **“Prescribe these things”** to Timothy, he means prescribe it with a reason; **“so that they [meaning all the church] may be above reproach;”** so that we may demonstrate the reputation of God to all those that might look from the world. That's why we need to care for those that can't care for themselves. That's why we care for our own. That's how come even though it's painstakingly difficult sometimes, we care and we love those who are unlovable because if they count themselves among us and if they're part of our church family and God can love them, then we need to desire to love those that need our care and guidance. How we are perceived in the eyes of men demonstrates what the reputation of God is to the world. The church needs to care for those widows that are true widows indeed and they need to be above reproach.

I realize that I am very fearful of how I would die. I imagine that there might be some pain involved and that's acceptable to me. For a long time, I wanted to die when I'm in sleep. I didn't want to go through any pain. That would be great. But, if I died a slow and painful death, I think that's more acceptable to me now. Not because I'm so courageous, but because I realized that it's only for a short time. Sure, it's a difficult time, but we have eternity to enjoy His presence.

I'm not afraid of the manner of my death. However, I *am* afraid of how I will die in terms of what I offered to the Lord during those last golden years of my life. This world teaches us to make your golden years ones full of wanton pleasure. We're supposed to save money so that we may have enough saved for what? For whatever. If you watch commercials, especially around Christmas time, it's so ridiculous. I have yet to meet an individual who buys their spouse a car for Christmas. Ridiculous. Yet every year, they project this idea that there are thousands of couples buying cars and putting giant bows on them saying, “Merry Christmas, here's your Lexus.”

Ridiculous. I don't think that that's true, but they suggest that it's possible. I got to admit however, that there is that tendency to be lured into that thinking. There is in me, there is in you, there is in all of us that natural worldly desire to look to our leisure. As we become older citizens, older members of this body of Christ, I hope that we stand for more than just getting by and being this cankerous old person that wants everyone to avoid so that we can have our own way.

Instead of having that kind of privileged attitude, I hope that we are the godly men and women; that our children would still delight to come and get wisdom from us and that their children would be amazed by our lives and that they would come

and get wisdom from us. And furthermore, that all the young people in the church (because we would be old by then) would still come to us because they delight in and they desire a life of godliness—the kind that they’ve seen in us. That’s what it means when it says prescribe these things so that they [children and grandchildren and widows] would understand how to live their lives with excellence and that the Lord would delight in them.

I hope I don’t grow old wanting retirement and wanting to cruise around the world. I hope I live for something greater. As much as I want to see Rome, if I never see Rome, that’s acceptable to me. I’d rather see the New Jerusalem. Some of you guys might have been there. I’ve seen the Grand Canyon when I was like five—a big hole in the ground. I can’t remember much. I just remember that it was very deep and that’s it. I kind of want to see the Grand Canyon again. But, if I never see it again in this lifetime, that’s perfectly acceptable. There’ll be greater things to see in the new heavens and the new earth. I would love to see the Niagara Falls. I’ve seen pictures of it and it looks very big. That’ll be one of those things you have to see in person to really appreciate. I’d love to see that. If I never do, there’ll be greater and more grandiose things that’ll be for eternity to explore. I don’t need to see everything here on earth. Don’t be captivated by that. Instead, be committed that we might live above reproach, so that we might live for something that is greater. It’s a principal for everyone to follow.

Not Honoring Widows is a Denial of Faith (v. 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.”

This is a very strong statement. It is the concluding statement of the paragraph from verses 3 to 8. Paul says, **“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household.”** It’s curious because in the first part he says **“But if anyone doesn’t provide for his own,”** he leaves it as a general statement. It could be addressed for his friends, but probably he is talking about the church in a general sense. He then gets more specific by saying, **“and especially for those of his household.”** Paul says that the one who does not provide for his own **“has denied the faith.”** This is a very strong statement.

There’s a desire in me to soften that up what Paul means here by saying that the kind of person he is referring to is one who has abjectly acted in a way that denies the faith. In other words, that he’s been inconsistent with what he should believe. I’d like to think that and perhaps that’s what it is. But at least on face value, it looks like Paul is saying that the one he is referring to is one who has repudiated and denied the faith of their fathers. This one has demonstrated an untrue faith.

It’s not saying that if you don’t take care of your father or mother that you are an unbeliever, but rather that you are acting **“worse than an unbeliever.”** That’s exactly what it says. The rest of it says that an unbeliever has denied the faith and is an unbeliever. It doesn’t mean that unbelievers are all bad. In fact, there are a lot of unbelievers who take care of their parents. But the point is that if even unbelievers know that that is the right thing to do, shouldn’t those in the household of faith know that even more? Shouldn’t we all be more careful to walk in a manner that honors our God and to care for those that need us, particularly our parents?

They are not worse in the sense that unbelievers are so bad. They are **“worse”** in the sense that of all people on the earth, believers should be the most loving, the most gracious to care for those who need us. In fact, let me give you a quick sampling of what William Barkley in his commentary says historically about the Greeks and their attitudes toward parents and the care for parents.

Solon, an Athenian lawmaker from the 6th century BC, said that sons and daughters were not only morally but also legally bound to support their parents. Anyone who refused that duty lost his civil rights. One Athenian orator said this, “So that whom did our lawgiver condemn to silence in this assembly of the people? Where does he make this clear? Let it be under scrutiny of public speakers in case there might be any among the people who is a striker of his father or mother or who neglects to maintain them or to give them a home.”

In other words, even amongst the early Greeks, they said that if you don’t take care of your parents, you don’t get to vote. You don’t get to participate in society. Philo wrote of this idea of honoring your parents. He said, “When old storks become unable to fly, they remain in their nests and are fed by their children who go through endless exertion to provide for their food because of their piety.” A funny analogy, but Philo uses an illustration from nature; that even animals take care of their own (or at least storks).

Aristotle in his work, *Nicomachen Ethics*, says that in the matter of food we should help our parents before all others, since we owe our nourishment to them. It is more honorable to help in this even before ourselves. Plato says in *The Laws* that next to the honor of loving parents, we have to pay the first and greatest and oldest of debts. He says that since all a man has is from those who gave him birth, he must do all he can to minister to them: first in his property; second in his person; and third in his soul; paying the debt due to them for the care which they bestowed upon him from the days of his infancy.

Even unbelievers understand the natural process of caring for aging parents who can’t care for themselves. How shameful if the church doesn’t realize that. Beyond what the world considers normal care, the church needs to care for those that are truly alone—genuine widows. We need to take care of those who have no one else because that would best represent the reputation and graciousness of our God. Again, we go back to that question we began with: “Why does

Paul spend such a large portion of this incredibly significant manual to the church on the care of widows?" It is so the church might be above reproach; so that they might bear the reputation of the living God in a manner appropriate to God. He is the avenger of orphans and widows and we need to be the caretakers of them just as He is the caretaker of them.

Let's close our time in prayer.

Heavenly Father,

We thank You for the gathering of the saints around the Scriptures this morning. As we look to the Scriptures this morning, we are reminded that You are a compassionate and gracious God and that in all things Lord, You have gone before us to care for us.

Lord, salvation and rescue from eternal damnation is just an extension of who You are. Lord, You are too just to allow sin to just go unpunished. You are too righteous and holy for that and at the same time Lord, You are too gracious to not provide us the means; and that means is through Your Son.

We give You praise that we might actually taste of the goodness of our God in this lifetime and with anticipation, look with full hope, with assurance of hope that our expectations of faith will be sight in that time to come.

So Lord, we live in this day and ask You to help us to be sanctified; to live in this day in a manner that is most befitting of Your reputation and glory.

Lord, and to that day, when there will be no hindrance to our ability to worship and honor You. So help us to honor You by honoring those that need us.

We praise You. We praise You for the practical nature of Your Word and the exhortation it gives us. Help us to walk in Your glory.

*In Jesus' Name,
Amen*