

“Widows Indeed”
1 Timothy 5:3-16
(Preached at Trinity, August 1, 2021)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In this chapter Paul is giving further instruction regarding the management and care of the church family.
Verses 1-2 address the proper way to handle cases of sin among the various age and gender groups. All should be treated with respect even when sin has to be confronted. As human beings they should be treated with dignity as those created in the image of God. As Christians they joined to Christ as co-heirs of the covenant promises.
2. In **Verses 3-16** Paul addresses how widows should be cared for in the church. Widows were a serious concern in the first century. The length of this passage demonstrates that this was an issue of which Paul felt the church needed careful instruction. Women tend to outlive men. This means widowhood was very common. The church would have had large numbers of women who had lost their husbands.
3. In the absence of their husbands, first-century widows would have often been without a means of support.
 - a. The first place of care was the extended family.
1 Timothy 5:8 NAU - "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."
 - b. In the absence of family, the church often stepped in to care for these ladies that would otherwise be left destitute.
4. The church does not have unlimited resources. They needed some guidance to determine which widows should have a higher priority in receiving aid. Paul's purpose here is to provide the church with instruction on how the church should care for their widows. This is the Word of God. The instruction is from God. It is God's way.
 - A. Paul determined that churches should maintain an official list containing the names of those widows who would receive the churches benevolence. Paul gives strict guidelines regarding those widows who would be placed on the list.
1 Timothy 5:9 NAU - "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,"
1 Timothy 5:11 NAU - "But refuse *to put* younger widows *on the list*,"
 - B. Those widows fulfilling these qualifications were referred to as "Widows indeed." This doesn't call into question whether they were true widows but whether they met the qualifications to be placed on the list. Nor did it mean that others not meeting the qualifications would be left destitute.
But Paul gives some specific guidance in this passage.
1 Timothy 5:3 NAU - "Honor widows who are widows indeed"
5. The first thing I want us to consider this morning is the nature of this list of widows. Second, we'll look at the qualifications for being placed on the list.

- I. Consider the list - **Verse 9** - "A widow is to be put on the list
- A. There was an official aspect of this list
1. There were duties and responsibilities given to those on the list
Barclay: "From this passage it is clear that the Church had an official register of widows . . . an order of elderly women who were set apart for special duties in the life and work of the church."¹
MacArthur suggests some of the possible duties of these widows:
 "In the early church there were groups of widows who served in some officially recognized capacity. Their duties surely included helping with the baptism of women, visiting the sick, visiting prisoners, teaching and disciplining younger women, helping younger women rear and nurture their children, and providing hospitality for visitors and strangers. They may have also assisted in placing orphans into proper Christian homes."
 2. Again, this doesn't necessarily mean the church did not provide aid to other widows not on the list. There may have been more than one list. The important focus here was this particular list of ladies who would commit themselves in service to the church.
 3. We can also see the value of mature ladies serving as mentors in the Titus 2 model.
Titus 2:3-5 NAU - "Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, ⁴ so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, ⁵ to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored."
 4. This made the qualifications all the more important. They needed to be ladies who had demonstrated spiritual maturity. Their lives needed to model holiness and a love for Christ and His people.
 5. Those on this list would have been given particular tasks and duties. One of the responsibilities of the deacons was to care for the widows. These widows may have helped them in this task.
 This doesn't imply they received a salary nor was it considered an official office. But it does imply that they needed to maintain faithfulness to their commitment in order to continue receiving provision from the church.
 6. This is consistent with the principle of Biblical benevolence. The poor should be willing to labor for their provision.
Deuteronomy 24:19 NAS - "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."

¹ William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960) Page 124.

- B. Those placed on the list apparently made a vow of commitment.
1. The vow would have involved commitment of perpetual faithfulness, a vow of service to the church.
 2. **Verses 11-12** imply the sin of younger widows who had made the vow and then abandoned their commitment in their desire to get married. "because they have set aside their previous pledge."
 3. The word translated "pledge" is the word for faith. These young widows were abandoning their faithfulness to Christ and His church. They were abandoning their vow of service.
- C. Many today would call such a process grossly unfair
1. Many demand that all be treated equally without any distinctions. They would resist placing any conditions upon benevolence.
 2. This risks putting an undue burden upon the church and limiting the resources available for those who were worthy of the churches provision.
- II. What were the qualifications to be placed on the list
- A. While the church has an obligation to care for its widows, it must first establish that they meet certain Biblical standards for aid. This is true of all benevolence in the church.
1. God's standards must be always be followed.
1 Timothy 5:7 NAU - "Prescribe these things as well, so that they may be above reproach." "Prescribe" = "command"
 2. The church must ask some important questions to determine which widows are truly in need and worthy of the church's care.
 3. Does she have a family that could care for her? Has she demonstrated a pattern of godliness in her life?
 4. Paul lists several qualifications that a widow needs to meet before she is placed on the list. Would you qualify?
- B. Has she demonstrated a pattern of godliness? **Verses 4-5**
1. Paul states there were two types of widows in the church.
 - a. Those who were faithful followers of Christ and those who were not. Paul says some were believers and some were unbelievers.
1 Timothy 5:6 NAU - "But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives."
 - b. This is true of others in the church. There are those who faithfully serve and worship Christ, and those who are "dead even while they live."
 2. Paul gives several areas of importance.
- C. She was a woman of faith. She was a genuine believer.
1. Even in her condition of need she maintained her hope in God. Not only did she trust her soul into the hands of God. She also trusted her life.
 2. She had a robust prayer life
1 Timothy 5:5 NAU - "continues in entreaties and prayers night and day."

- D. She had a good reputation. Her life testified of her genuine faith.
1. This is similar to the qualification for pastors and deacons
1 Timothy 3:2 NAU - "An overseer, then, must be above reproach"
1 Timothy 3:7 NAU - "And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the church*"
 2. The widow indeed had to be known as a woman of faith—she trusted in the care of God. She was a woman of piety and prayer. Her spiritual life was known by all. **V.5**
 3. She had a reputation for doing good works
1 Timothy 5:10 NAU - "having a reputation for good works;"
 We read of such a woman by the name of Tabitha.
Acts 9:36 NAU - "Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which translated *in Greek* is called Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did."
Acts 9:39 NAU - "So Peter arose and went with them. When he arrived, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them."
- E. Her family life was a testimony to all
1. She demonstrated marital fidelity. She was a faithful wife.
1 Timothy 5:9 NAU - "*having been* the wife of one man,"
 This is the exact same qualification demanded of pastors.
1 Timothy 3:2 NAU - "the husband of one wife"
 2. She cared well for her children.
1 Timothy 5:10 NAU - "*and* if she has brought up children"
 - a. They would have been grown by this time. Their lives demonstrated that they had been taught well.
 - b. This was in a day when raising children was given little priority. Child exposure was not uncommon. This may imply she was involved in the rescue of children. Just as with the office of pastor, she needed to have demonstrated that she properly cared for her children.
- F. She manifested a life of servitude – serving Christ by serving others.
1. She was hospitable – **Verse 10**
 This is a different word than that used for pastors.
 Pastors: φιλόξενος – a lover of strangers. He gives himself to his sheep.
 Widows: ξενοδοχέω – a receiver of strangers. Her home was open.
 2. She had the heart of a servant - **1 Tim 5:10** - "she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress"
 Washing feet was the labor of servants. It was modeled after the example of Christ. She would have given herself in the lowest of labors for the benefit of the saints, assisting those in distress or whatever need she saw they needed.

- G. Paul also placed an age requirement before one was placed on the list.
1 Timothy 5:9 NAU - "A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old"
1. This also may sound strange today. Paul placed a high value on marriage.
1 Timothy 5:14 NAU - "I want younger *widows* to get married, bear children, keep house, *and* give the enemy no occasion for reproach;"
 2. Paul is making a statement that it is important for younger widows to remarry if possible. The family is important for the wellbeing of society.
 3. Some of this sounds strange to the modern ear. Many today resent the notion that women need to be cared for, much less cared for by a man. Many see little value for marriage and family. Many choose to cohabitate without commitment or responsibility.

Conclusion:

1. The church has great a responsibility to care for those among us who suffer need. James calls this the nature of religion in its purity.
James 1:27 NAU - "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."
2. But this care is not without limit, and not without discernment. It wasn't an entitlement. We must protect the church. Paul warns in 2 Thessalonians against helping those who refuse to work. Some were disqualified because they had not been faithful in their Christian life.
 Paul is giving instructions on helping those widows who had testified with their lives a model of purity and Christian faithfulness.
3. Every Christian lady should ask herself, would I be placed on the list?