

“Unbelieving Widows”  
1 Timothy 5:11-15  
(Preached at Trinity, August 8, 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 **Verses 3-16** Paul addresses how widows should be cared for by the church. We've spent the last couple weeks focusing on this subject.  
Widows were a serious issue in ancient times. With women commonly outliving men widowhood was common. In the absence of their husbands, first-century widows would have often been without a means of support. The first place of care was the extended family. In the absence of family, the church often stepped in to care for these ladies that would otherwise be left destitute.
2. The church does not have unlimited resources, then or now. In this passage Paul is giving some guidance to help the church determine which widows should be given a higher priority in receiving aid. Paul determined that churches should maintain an official list containing the names of those widows who should receive the churches assistance. Paul gives strict guidelines regarding those widows who would be placed on the list.  
Those widows fulfilling these qualifications were referred to as “Widows indeed.”  
**1 Timothy 5:3 NAU - "Honor widows who are widows indeed"**
3. The widows on this list were also given special ministries in the church.  
**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.”<sup>1</sup>
4. These needed to be ladies who had demonstrated spiritual maturity. Their lives needed to model holiness and a love for Christ and His people.  
Most likely, these widows were not the only ones to receive the care of the church, but they certainly held a place of priority, and their service would have been a great benefit to the church.
5. In these verses Paul described two types of widows in the church—those who met the qualifications for receiving aid from the church and those who did not.  
There were three questions the church needed to consider.
  1. Does she have a family that can care for her - We have an obligation to provide for those of our immediate family. See verses 4, 8, 16
  2. Has she demonstrated a pattern of godliness – See Verses 5, 9-10
  3. Is she young where remarriage is likely. See Verses 11-15
6. The young widows faced particular temptations and Paul is saying that, if possible, marriage should be sought. The suggestion is that marriage would help keep them from sin. As Paul states it, "**and give the enemy no occasion for reproach;**"

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

7. There were apparently some widows who with the death of their husband abandoned all sense of propriety.  
**1 Timothy 5:13 NAU** - "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*."
8. The suggestion is that some had also abandoned the faith. Paul describes such a widow as, "dead even while she lives."  
 This is hard for us to hear. Paul is saying that in the local church there would be both believers and unbelievers.  
 The church must always strive for a regenerate membership. We must give all due diligence to who we receive into the church. We must be careful who we baptize. But we do not have perfect discernment. To our great grief, every pastor can testify to the reality of unregenerate people who find their way into the church. This is why Christ has granted to the church the authority of excommunication. In this passage Paul describes the great contrast between belief and unbelief.
9. Of the believing widows Paul describes their holy character. Testimonies of God's transforming grace.  
**1 Timothy 5:5 NAU** – She "has fixed her hope on God and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day."  
**1 Timothy 5:10 NAU** - "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."
10. Paul also describes the unbelieving widows  
**1 Timothy 5:6 NAU** - "But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives."  
**1 Timothy 5:13 NAU** - "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*."  
 This is the sad reality faced by every local church. While there are those who faithfully serve and worship Christ, there are also those who are "dead even while they live."  
 Paul wrote in **Philippians 3:17-19** - "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. <sup>18</sup> For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* enemies of the cross of Christ, <sup>19</sup> whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things."
9. Last time we observed the qualities of those who were placed on the list. These were Godly ladies with a reputation of faithful service.  
 This morning I want to spend some time looking at the other group. It is important to look at these so we can understand the contrast between belief and unbelief. Too often we dismiss the wonder of regeneration.
10. We'll look at them under two headings: their nature and their lives.

- I. Paul describes their nature – she is "dead even while she lives."
- A. Fallen humanity has fallen into spiritual death
1. God warned Adam:  
**Genesis 2:16-17 NAU** - "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; <sup>17</sup> but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die."  
    - a. Upon eating the fruit Adam became mortal. His body began to suffer all of the maladies of our fallen condition. He would have known sickness and disease. He would have experienced the process of aging, and in due time, he died.
    - b. But Adam suffered another death. Adam died spiritually.
  2. Spiritual death is the loss of the ability to know God, to approach Him properly, to walk before Him in righteousness.  
**Ephesians 2:1-3 NAU** - "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, <sup>2</sup> in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. <sup>3</sup> Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."
  3. The lost man lacks spiritual discernment  
He lives and walks in spiritual darkness and is pleased and content to be in this condition.  
**John 3:19-20 NAU** - "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup> "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."
  4. Satan keeps the lost man blinded in his sin.  
**2 Corinthians 4:3-4 NAU** - "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, <sup>4</sup> in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."  
**Verse 15** - "some have already turned aside to follow Satan."
  5. Those who are spiritually dead have no ability to turn to God.  
He isn't merely sick or weak where he might limp back to God. He is dead, a corpse in full decay
- B. Paul says these lost widows were in this condition – dead while they live
1. They were alive physically, but spiritually they were dead, rotting, corpses
  2. The fearful thing is they were a part of the church. They were widows just like the Godly widows. Both groups had lost their husbands and both groups were being evaluated for the assistance of the church. But these lost widows had no part in the body of Christ.
  3. Salvation demands a radical transformation. We have to be raised from the dead.  
**2 Corinthians 5:17 NAU** - "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

- II. Paul directs our attention to the lives of these lost widows
- A. Their spiritual condition is displayed in how they lived
1. This is always the case. People live consistently with their heart.  
**Matthew 15:18-19 NAU** - "But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. <sup>19</sup> "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders."
  2. Humanity has a heart problem  
**Genesis 6:5 NAU** - "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."  
His heart is only evil – evil is all that it can produce  
His heart is only evil continually.
  3. Paul describes the condition of humanity clearly in Romans 1. We sin because we have a sinful heart. God has given us over to our corruption.  
**See Romans 1:21-32**
  4. We read in Jeremiah  
**Jeremiah 17:9 NAU** – “The heart is more deceitful than all else  
And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?”  
a. The heart is desperately sick – in other words it is incurable  
b. The wicked heart of man cannot be patched or mended. It cannot be improved. It must be replaced with a new heart.
- B. Paul describes the sins that were particular to these widows
1. **Verse 6** – they’re given over to wanton pleasure. Sensual gratification. The ESV describes it as “self-indulgent.”  
a. In **2 Timothy 3:5** Paul describes the heart of the lost – “lovers of pleasure rather than loves of God.”  
**Verse 11** – "they feel sensual desires in disregard of Christ"  
b. While the faithful widow kept her attention upon God, the faithless widow maintained her attention upon fleshly lusts.
  2. **Verse 13** – "they also learn *to be* idle, as they go around from house to house"  
a. The word for idle means careless, useless, lazy  
b. Without a sense of the presence of God in everything we will find ourselves wandering aimlessly.
  3. Paul describes these widows as wandering aimlessly from house to house with no place particular to go, nothing particular to do. This describes those who troll social media sites all day. Today they wander about without even leaving home.
  4. This doesn’t mean Christians should not be social. They should, but their interactions with others should be primarily spiritual. Philip Ryken shares: “It is good for Christians to stay in close touch with one another, of course, but not just to have something juicy to talk about. Instead, intimate conversations should be directed toward encouraging the weak, helping the needy, saving lost souls, and setting an agenda for prayer. Christian friendships should be spiritual as well as social.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Daniel M. Doriani, and Philip

5. These idle widows became gossips and busybodies. Paul described this also in 2 Thes.
- 2 Thessalonians 3:11 NAU** - "For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies."
- a. A busybody is someone who meddles in the affairs of others rather than tending to his own life. Idleness fosters this behavior. They have too much free time. They busy themselves with looking at others with a critical heart and even gossiping about them.
  - b. The word for "gossip" literally means "to babble." "talking about things not proper *to mention*." They would receive information they did not need to know and then quickly share it with others who also did not need to know.
  - c. I've preached for years about the standard of "need to know." But few take it to heart. "Need to know" means sharing information you need to share, with those who have the need to know and the right to know. If we lived by this standard, we would speak a whole lot less. Our words are important.

#### Conclusion:

1. What are we to make of these two types of widows? Paul's point is to make a distinction between those who were to receive the church's help and those who would not. But Paul is also describing the vast difference between the believer and unbeliever.
2. These mark the two classes of people upon the earth. Those who are spiritually alive and those who are dead. Those who have their hope in God and those who have little interest in Him.
3. It is a terrible thing when the church is plagued by members who are still in unbelief. They have no interest in spiritual things. This is always of great concern to the church. Robert Yarbrough – "They had simply reverted to lives emptied of the serious pursuit of Christ and were dragging others into their distractions. For pastoral leaders like Paul and Timothy who took note of individual lives, this is ample cause for dire concern."<sup>3</sup>
4. This is why prayer and the ministry of the Word is so important to pastoral ministry. Only God can change a sinner's heart.

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Graham Ryken, *Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 217.

<sup>3</sup> Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, ed. D. A. Carson, *Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; London: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2018), 280.