

The Role of the Church in Caring for Widows: A Social-Historical Investigation of 1 Timothy 5:3–16

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Abstract

The message of 1 Timothy 5:3–16 on widow-care remains a significant mandate to the church today. The study explores the role of the church in taking care of widows. In this pericope, Paul gives guidance on caring for genuine widows, instructs believers whose parents or grandparents are widows to care for them, and counsels younger widows to remarry. He further gives criteria for determining genuine widows to be cared for by the church. The study first focuses on the original message of Paul to his audience in 1 Timothy 5:3–16. Second, it looks at the category of widows Paul recommends as worthy of the church's support. Third, the paper examines whether the younger widows seeking remarriage were viewed as ignoring prior faith in God. The final section of this paper applies Paul's teaching to the modern church context. Paul's mandate to the church to look into the welfare of widows still stands, and widows with able children should be supported by their families. Finally, the younger widows seeking remarriage could only cast off their first faith if they married an unbeliever. This research uses the social-historical method.

Keywords: Widow-Care, Family, True Widow, Younger Widows, Remarriage, Women.

Introduction

The concern for widows and other underprivileged groups like orphans and aliens is given special attention in the Bible. In the Old Testament, a widow was a woman whose husband had

died and was vulnerable because he had no adult male relative to serve as her legal protector.¹ As a result, many widows were disinherited, defrauded, and left poor, hopeless, and helpless. Thus, widows needed protection and legal provisions because their rights could easily be trampled upon; “without a legal protector, the position of the widow in Israelite society was precarious; she was often neglected or exploited.”² However, the Scriptures advocate for the dignity and rights of widows and present God as the ultimate defender of their rights (Ps 68:5; 146:9; Prov 15:25). Nevertheless, widows faced injustices even with the divine laws (Ps 94:6; Isa 1:23; Ezk 22:7).

In the modern church context, a holistic ministry encompassing social, economic, and spiritual needs is necessary for all groups represented in a congregation. This emphasis is even more essential when vulnerable and underprivileged individuals are within a Christian assembly. The apostolic church laid out a pattern for the church across ages in meeting the needs of vulnerable groups like widows. Paul highlights to his spiritual son Timothy the church’s role in caring for genuine widows. The following section focuses on widow-care in the Old Testament, New Testament, the Greco-Roman world, and the Apostle Paul’s instructions in 1 Timothy 5:3–16.

Literary context

1 Timothy 5:3–16 occurs within the preceding context of 1 Timothy 4:1–5:2, where apostle Paul addresses the issue of apostasy in the latter days and warns Timothy to watch his life and doctrine closely. In the selected text, Paul’s protégé needed to maintain a respectful relationship with older believers (1 Tim. 5:1–2) and ensure that genuine widows are taken care of by the church (1 Timothy 5:3–16). The rest of chapters 5 and 6 deal with matters concerning elders and slaves.

Historical and Social Cultural Context

Internal evidence indicates that Paul wrote the epistle (1:1) to Timothy, his spiritual son, in Ephesus (1:3). At the time of Paul’s writing, Ephesus was in the Roman province of Asia. Scholars argue Androclus, son of Chondrus the King of Athens, was the founder of Ephesus city,

¹ Geoffrey William Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Vol. 4: Q - Z, Fully rev., [Nachdr.], vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2002), 1060.

² Bromiley, 4:1060.

which was initially a seaport. Today the city of Ephesus is located several miles inland. Ephesus history and designation antedate c. 1100 BCE.³ Timothy had been left in Ephesus to deal with false teaching and teachers and nurture the church to spiritual maturity.

Widow-Care in the Old Testament

Ministry to the widows is a prominent instruction in the Old Testament. In Exodus, widows were not to be mistreated (Ex 22:22). The law of Moses also mandated the protection of widows against social injustices alongside other vulnerable groups like orphans, aliens, and strangers (Deut 14:28–29; 24:17–18). Israelites were commanded not to oppress the widows (Zach 7:10). Flemming states that widows were often oppressed in the ancient Near East times because they were defenseless.⁴ In addition, others found ways of oppressing them and even denying them opportunities because of their widowhood which resulted in them being lonely and poor.⁵ In Isaiah 1:17, the ancient nation of Israel was instructed to “learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed; judge for the fatherless, plead for the widows” (KJV). It is worth noting that the Old Testament presents God as the defender of the defenseless and condemns those who oppress them.⁶ The Scriptures expressed God’s heart for social justice, thus safeguarding the interests of the underprivileged and less fortunate.

Widow-Care in the New Testament

In the New Testament times, the social and legal situation of the widows was no different from the Old Testament.⁷ Many widows were poor and unable to secure justice (Lk 21:2–4; Mk 12:42–44). However, during his ministry on earth, Jesus restored to life the son of the widow of Nain (Lk 7:11–15), who supposedly was her protector. This instance demonstrates Jesus’ concern for the underprivileged in society.

The apostolic church cared for the physical needs of widows (Acts 6:1–7) both from the Jewish and Greek backgrounds. Winter affirms that the church took the responsibility to look after the concerns of widows who were unable to support themselves financially and with food

³ Gordon D Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2011), 117.

⁴ Donald C Fleming, *Bridge Bible Directory: An A to Z of Biblical Information for the People of Today’s World* (Brisbane, Australia: Bridgeway, 1990), 489, <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/23136886.html>.

⁵ Flemming, 489.

⁶ Bonnie Bowman Thurston, *The Widows: A Women’s Ministry in the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 14.

⁷ Bromiley, 4:1061.

(1 Tim 5:16).⁸ The writer of the epistle of James instructs that faith in God should be evidenced in caring for the disadvantaged groups, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (Jas 1:27). In addition, Paul elaborately stresses to Timothy the need to care for the true widows in 1 Timothy 5.

Widow-Care in the Greco-Roman Context

In the Greco-Roman World, the term “widow” referred to a woman whose husband had died and lacked means of support. In the Roman context, the state had an obligation to provide financial and material aid to the needy, including widows.⁹ However, in cases where a widow had children, they were expected to offer support to their parents. As a result, widows were admitted and accepted into their son’s households for material support.¹⁰ It is without surprise that Paul’s instruction to children and grandchildren to take care of their old parents was relevant within the surrounding context.

Remarriage of widows was allowed in the Greco-Roman world, and there was no stigmatization of the married widow.¹¹ Later, during the period of St. Augustine, divorced women and widows were encouraged to remarry, and sanctions were imposed on unmarried women.¹² Winter mentions that the marriage laws (*lex Julia*) punished the unmarried and those divorced between the ages of 20–50 but failed to marry or remarry. Consequently, he observes that a younger widow was punished if she failed to remarry within two years and eight months. He estimates that forty percent of women between the age of 40 and 45 were widows, and, as a group, they comprised thirty percent of women in the ancient world.¹³

As the church advanced and faced contextual realities, it prioritized widow care in Christian congregations.¹⁴ For this care to be achieved, there was a need for proper laid down procedures concerning the identity of true widows. Also, it was necessary to remind the church

⁸ B. W. Winter “Providencia for the Widows of 1 Timothy 5:3–16.” *Tyndale Bulletin*, 39 (1988): 83–100.

⁹ Hubert Cancik et al., eds., *Brill’s New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World. Antiquity* (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2002), 631.

¹⁰ Cancik et al., 632.

¹¹ Bruce W. Winter. *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and Pauline Communities*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 124.

¹² Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, 124.

¹³ Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, 125.

¹⁴ Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, 125.

of its obligation to the widows and emphasize the filial responsibility to their bereaved relatives.¹⁵ The following section deals with an exegesis of the Greek text (1 Timothy 5:3–16).¹⁶

Exegesis of 1 Timothy 5:3–16

Command to Honor True Widows (1 Tim. 5:3)

In 5:3, Paul instructs, Χήρας τίμα τὰς ὄντως χήρας (Honor widows who are truly widows).¹⁷ This verse summarizes Paul's intention in writing 1 Timothy 5:3–16. Through the leadership of his spiritual son Timothy, he wanted the church to honor true widows in their midst.

In the phrase Χήρας τίμα (honor widows), τίμα is an imperative that conveys a strong instigation. In this context, the verb τιμάω, which we get τίμα, means to ascribe worth or respect to someone by providing financial support.¹⁸ In verse 17, the noun refers to the respect given to elders who diligently preach and teach the word of God. Again, τίμα (honor) in the New Testament conveys the sense of showing respect to parents (Ephesians 6:2). The adverb ὄντως further qualifies the noun χήρας. The church was to honor or respect those who were genuine widows. According to 1 Timothy 5:3, honor implies demonstrating respect by one's attitude through material and financial support. (vv.4, 8). The real widow is one without a family to depend on for support.

Instruction for Children and Grandchildren to Care for their Widowed Parent (5:4)

In verse 4, Paul instructs that if a widow has children and grandchildren, they should practice their religion by supporting their own family. The verse has four parts: a conditional clause (protasis), a complementary clause (apodosis), a causal clause, and an epexegetical clause. Verse 4 begins with a phrase, εἰ δέ τις χήρα τέκνα ἢ ἔκγονα ἔχει (if, however, a widow has children or grandchildren). The contrastive conjunction δέ (however) at the beginning of verse 4 introduces an antithetical statement. Verse 4b contains the complementary clause and epexegetical clause μανθανέτωσαν πρῶτον τὸν ἴδιον οἶκον εὐσεβεῖν καὶ ἀμοιβὰς ἀποδιδόναι τοῖς προγόνοις, τοῦτο

¹⁵ Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, 125.

¹⁶ The Greek text is based on: Barbara Alland et., al., eds, *The Greek New Testament*, Fifth edition, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2018).

¹⁷ The translation of the selected passage is mine unless stated otherwise.

¹⁸ Timothy Friberg, and Barbara Friberg, *Analytical Greek New Testament (GNM)*. 2nd ed. n.p.: Timothy and Barbara Friberg, 1994. BibleWorks, v.10..

γάρ ἐστιν ἀπόδεκτον ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ (these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God). The parents' situation affords the children and or grandchildren an opportunity to learn and exercise godliness. Believers in God's household should honor their parents and grandparent by providing for their needs. Children receive love, shelter, care, and home security from parents; thus, their reciprocal support becomes an act of gratitude.

The expegetical clause καὶ ἀμοιβὰς ἀποδιδόναι τοῖς προγόνοις, τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν ἀπόδεκτον ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ (and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God) explains the previous statement about children learning their religious duty to their own family. Towner alludes that the phrase stands as a kind of appositive to the preceding one, which speaks of how children should put their religion into practice by reciprocating the earlier care they had received from their parents.¹⁹ The phrase γάρ ἐστιν ἀπόδεκτον ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ (for this pleasing before God) closely mirrors the fifth commandment: "Honor your father and mother, as the Lord your God commanded you that your days may be long and that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you" (Deut 5:16, NKJV). Towner observes that this practice of caring for older parents was widespread in the Greco-Roman world because the state was to provide financial and material aid to the needy.²⁰ One of the Roman society's obligations was to care for the needy family, an ideal generally practiced at the family level. In this passage, Paul admonished children and grandchildren to learn to take care of their (grand)parents (1 Tim 5:4). Honoring one's parents involves caring for their financial needs as they grow older.

The Character of a True Widow (5:5)

Paul continues to affirm in verse 5, ἡ δὲ ὄντως χήρα καὶ μεμονωμένη ἤλπιεν ἐπὶ θεὸν καὶ προσμένει ταῖς δεήσεσιν καὶ ταῖς προσευχαῖς νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας (But she who is truly a widow and who in her desolate state hopes in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day). The phrase "the one who is truly a widow" in 5a shifts the focus back to the former reference and sets a stage for describing the one deserving support. Implicitly, according to verse 4, a genuine widow is not the one who has children and grandchildren who can offer support but

¹⁹ Philip Towner. *The Letters to Timothy & Titus. The New International Commentary on the New Testament.* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 353.

²⁰ Towner, 354.

the desolate one who ἤλπικεν (hopes in God). A true widow puts her hope in God as her provider. Reiteratively, a true widow is in need and left alone with no one to aid her. She has no supporting family; therefore, the church must step in to respond to her needs. God is her provider and protector; “A Father to the fatherless, a defender of widows is God in his holy dwelling” (Ps 68:5, NIV).

The verb προσμένει is a present indicative active that means “steadfast” or “continues.”²¹ Therefore, the true widow continues in supplications and prayers, night and the day (all the time).²² Prophetess Anna is an example of this portrait (Luke 2:37). Even at the advanced age of eighty-four, she continued to worship the Lord- fasting and praying day and night. Thus, a true widow has no supporting family and one whose dedication and hope is only on God.

Widows Living for Pleasure (5:6)

Using the phrase ἡ δὲ σπαταλῶσα (but she, who lives for pleasure), Paul contrasts the genuine widow in the preceding verse who trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day (1 Tim. 5:5) with a widow who lives for pleasure. According to Paul, the one who lives for pleasure ζῶσα τέθνηκεν (is dead even while she lives). The present participle verb ζῶσα is temporal. Mounce asserts that the widow has lived not for God but for pleasure.²³ Even though she is alive, she has died and continues in the finality of that state.²⁴ It conveys the status of her spiritual condition. The one who lives for pleasure is a widow who is dead spiritually and deserves no support from the church.²⁵ They do not belong to the church and hence are not eligible for its support.²⁶ Winter convincingly argues that living for pleasure hinted at sexual promiscuity at face value. He further argues that a ‘new woman’ appeared in Rome and in the East in the first century, where the church was taking root. She was self-indulgent, self-centered, physically alive, but spiritually dead.

Further, “this ‘new woman,’ often of respectable background, openly flaunted the proper behavior expected of Roman wives and widows; she participated in public life, dressed

²¹ Durative present, the action of praying night and day reoccurs from time to time, the action is held repeatedly.

²² Genitive of time, telling us that, supplications of prayers are made by a true widow by night and by day.

²³ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 10. print, Word Biblical Commentary 46 (Nashville: Nelson, 2009), 832-834.

²⁴ Mounce, 832.

²⁵ Mounce, 834.

²⁶ Samuel M. Ngewa, *1&2 Timothy and Titus*. Africa Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 119.

provocatively, behaved as an independent, sexually free woman.”²⁷ In this context, Paul dissuades Christian women and widows from imitating her. Krause presumes that Paul was trying to capitalize on apostolic calling to guide believers, although she terms Paul’s sentiments in this context as adversative to the female gender, in other words, anti-feminist.²⁸ Proponents who support this view argue that Paul’s writing on the promiscuous lifestyle of the young widows is an indicator of Paul’s fear of women’s sexuality.²⁹ They claim that the letter reveals the struggles the early church had regarding gender, class, church order, and the meaning of tradition, which provides a better ground to find the struggles of the modern church.³⁰ This assertion is untrue because Paul’s primary concern was the care of true widows by the church and not anti-feminism. The Bible affirms that “to be carnally minded is death; but spiritually minded is life and peace” (Rom 8:6, NLT). This Scripture distinguishes between the spiritually and carnal-minded, devoid of feminist sentiments. In the context of 1 Timothy 5:3–16, only the spiritually minded widows were to benefit from the support of the church. The widows who lived for pleasure did not deserve support from the church because of their sensuality. Widows in the church who choose to live for pleasure separate themselves from fellowship with God and the church.

In verse 7, Paul instructs Timothy καὶ ταῦτα παράγγελλε (also command these things), referring to his teachings on this subject. The church should honor and support true widows since they look up to God alone. However, the church should be relieved in cases where the widows have children or grandchildren who can offer support. Having contrasted the two kinds of widows, he admonishes Timothy to teach these things ἵνα ἀνεπίλημπτοι ᾖσιν (so that they may be above reproach). The church community and families are to consistently respond to the needs of the widows so that the church may be above reproach.

Similarly, the command (παράγγελλε) could be directed at the church to enlist the widow in verse 5 who trusts in God and not the one in verse 6 who lives for pleasure. The purpose clause introduced by Paul with ἵνα emphasizes the verb’s purpose. The church was the first place where devotion to taking care of the widows was to be expressed practically.³¹ Winter argues

²⁷ Hellen K. Bond, Review of Bruce W. Winter, ‘Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities’ *Conversations in Religion and Theology*, 4 (2006), 17-20.

²⁸ Deborah Krause. *A New Biblical Commentary*. (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 102.

²⁹ Krause, 102.

³⁰ Krause, 103.

³¹ Winter *Providencia for the Widows of 1 Timothy 5:3–16*, 90.

that this kind of filial compassion implied by the noun ἀμοιβὰς in verse 4b may include financial support because Christians were required to support the widows as compensation.³² He affirms that, in a society where the meeting of needs was of great significance, its breach was a great violation to neglect one's parents.³³ By making these things plain, no one (including widows, family, and the church) would be subject to blame.

Those who Failure to Provide for Immediate Family Members (5:8)

In 1 Timothy 5:8, Paul further addresses Timothy regarding those who do not provide for their own family members εἰ δέ τις τῶν ἰδίων καὶ μάλιστα οἰκείων οὐ προνοεῖ, τὴν πίστιν ἥρνηται καὶ ἔστιν ἀπίστου χειρὼν (But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for his family members, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever). According to verse 4, the needs within a family provide an opportunity to learn and practice godliness. Therefore, in verse 8, those who do not provide for their own families are worse than unbelievers. Such a person has denied the faith.

Fee remarks that it seemed some relatives had left their mothers and grandmothers who were widows to seek help in the church.³⁴ This possibility could explain Paul's use of strong language that those who cannot care for their relatives are worse than unbelievers. White affirms that "the Christian who falls below the best heathen standard of family affection is the more blameworthy since he has what the heathen has not, the supreme example of love in Jesus Christ."³⁵

Believers are to provide for their own family and close relatives, failure to which they deny the faith. If Christians cannot care for their immediate family, how can they demonstrate love to others? They are worse than unbelievers because some unbelievers also take better care of their families.

Further Qualifications for Widows to be Enrolled (5:9–10)

In this section, Paul adds a list of qualifications of true widows to be supported by the church. In verse 9, the widow must not be less than sixty years old. In addition, she must have been the wife

³² Winter *Providencia for the Widows of 1 Timothy 5:3–16*, 90.

³³ Winter *Providencia for the Widows of 1 Timothy 5:3–16*, 90.

³⁴ Fee, 121.

³⁵ Newport J. D. White, "The First and Second Epistles to Timothy and the Epistle to Titus." In *The Expositor's Greek Testament*. Vol 5 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1967), 129.

of one man. Evidently, from the text, a widow had to meet various qualifications for her name to be καταλεγέσθω (listed). This verb καταλεγέσθω from the root καταλεγω meaning ‘enlist’ or ‘enroll’ or ‘register’ carries an idea of selecting as you add to a list. Being enrolled signified them being part of the church for special care. Ward notes that sixty was a significant age because, at this age, the widow could be trusted to devote her time to the service of Christ.³⁶

Mounce mentions that the repeated adversative δέ, “but” (vv. 4, 6, 8, 11) divides the widows into those that the church should care for and those who were to rely on other sources. He also affirms that not enrolling widows who were less than sixty did not mean that the church could not help widows truly in need.³⁷ The qualified widow also needed to have had one husband. This is a similar qualification for overseers, who must be a husband to one wife (1 Tim 3:2). Based on the interpretation of 1 Timothy 3:2 regarding the overseer being a man of one wife, the widow was to be a wife devoted to her husband, which speaks of her action, attitude, purity, and not merely marital status. The woman could have been disqualified from being listed as a true widow if she lived in unfaithfulness.³⁸ The next verse adds another six criteria.

First, the widow should be a person ἐν ἔργοις καλοῖς μαρτυρουμένη³⁹ (having a reputation for good works). Second, the widow is qualified εἰ ἐτεκνοτρόφησεν (if she has brought up children), including her children and orphans. Third, εἰ ἐξενδοχῆσεν (if she has shown hospitality to strangers). Fourth, εἰ ἁγίων πόδας ἔνιψεν (if she has washed the feet of the saints). The saints were of the Christian community with whom a true widow would have offered service to them by washing their feet.

The foot-washing practice had great significance from the Old Testament period. In Genesis 18:4, Abraham washed the feet of the divine messenger. Coloe asserts that washing the feet in Jewish tradition was a sign of hospitality.⁴⁰ She attests that this was a standard greeting when one was receiving visitors.⁴¹ It was also a form of personal hygiene in the Greco-Roman world.⁴² The practice of washing the feet of others was also evident in the gospels. In Luke 7:36–50, we see a woman who anointed Jesus’s feet with oil, maybe because no one had washed

³⁶ Ronald A. Ward, *Commentary on 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, (Texas: Word books, 1982), 83-84.

³⁷ Mounce, 818.

³⁸ MacArthur, John F. *1 Timothy*, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary*. Chicago: Moody 2011), 259.

³⁹ Gnostic or customary present.

⁴⁰ Mary Coloe, *Welcome into the Household of God: The Footwashing in John 13*. (Virginia: Elenchus Biblica 2004): 29.

⁴¹ Coloe, 30.

⁴² Coloe, 31.

Jesus's feet, though it was a culture to wash visitors' feet before meals or on arrival. However, the incident in the gospel account has a symbolic idea. The phrase εἰ ἀγίων πόδας ἔνιψεν in 1 Timothy 5 demonstrates the humility of widows serving, which was of the humble heart. In John 13, Jesus washed his disciples' feet to teach them humility. He showed them the need to serve one another in humility.

The fifth criterion for listing one as a genuine widow was εἰ θλιβομένοις ἐπήρκεσεν (if she has assisted those in distress). She must have rendered relief to those suffering in the community, and her good works were evident. Sixth, εἰ παντὶ ἔργῳ ἀγαθῷ ἐπηκολούθησεν (if she has devoted herself to every good work). In 1 Timothy 5:10e, Paul affirms that a true widow was the one who had followed every good work, which is an indication of her commitment to serving. The qualifications of genuine widows were elaborate. As a result, some scholars wrongly conclude that Paul was describing a special order of widows with some charitable and spiritual duties to perform, for which they received some support.⁴³

Instructions on the Younger Widows (1 Timothy 5:11–13)

As Paul recommends, older widows be listed and permanently devoted to Christ, and he lays out instructions regarding the younger widows. His counsel is simply remarriage. Paul instructed Timothy not to enlist the younger widows. The reasons given are in verse 11c; which is that they would want to marry when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ. The verb καταστρηνιάω is indicative of the widow's promiscuous lifestyle. However, this seems unlikely, given that they have a desire to marry.⁴⁴ What is more difficult to understand is precisely why this is concluded as their passions drawing them away from Christ. Paul states that "their passions draw them away from Christ" and depict desertion of their first pledge.

The verb καταστρηνιάωσιν is an aorist, which intensifies the meaning, and, in this context, it contributes to the sense of action "against," of which "Christ" becomes the recipient as in the statement that they "grow malevolent against Christ."⁴⁵ The pledge could have probably been more or less of a commitment to join the list of widows, whereby the woman vowed to serve Christ without anticipating

⁴³ J. H. Benard *The Pastoral Epistles*. Reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 80-81.

⁴⁴ David Horrel, *1 Timothy Reconsidered* (1 TIM 5.1-6.2), 109-134.

⁴⁵ Constantive, focusing on the whole action of the younger widows turning against Christ without drawing attention to the beginning, progress or results of their action.

remarriage.⁴⁶ In the context of 1 Timothy 5:12, possibly the younger widows had been offered support based on their pledge to service. If they remarried, their original consent to minister would be inconsequential. Paul might have felt that this deviated from their first faith in Christ, not apostasy but a spiritual deficiency. The church in Ephesus might have had problems with the younger widows who wanted to receive support from the church and yet had a desire to get married. If they became ‘unfaithful’ and got married, they were to be discontinued from the daily distribution as it is referred to in (Acts 6:1).

Paul did not discourage the remarriage of the younger widows (1 Tim. 5:14). However, widows were to remarry only in the Lord (and the widows were to marry fellow Christians 1 Cor. 7:39). So, Paul instructed Timothy to exclude young widows from the list of genuine widows because they may at some point want to marry when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ; hence they incur condemnation for violating their first pledge (1 Tim 5:12). Further, in verse 13 a, Paul’s second reason younger widows were not to be enrolled was more of a prevalent behavior during Paul’s time. The younger widows tended to become idle and practiced gossip.

The young widows’ association with Satan meant the younger widows were propagating the false doctrine of the opponents, which Paul found objectionable.⁴⁷ The younger widows carried people’s affairs from one to another, “telling the affairs of all to all.”⁴⁸ In this context of 1 Timothy 5:13, Paul uses an expression that the younger widows were spreading words that were defective to the fellowship of believers. It was easy for these young widows to carry people’s affairs from house to house.

Paul urged Timothy not to put younger widows of less than sixty years on the list of true widows to be recognized and supported by the church. The reason for refusal is that younger widows may grow wanton which means to experience sexual desires and hence have a desire to marry presumably to an unbeliever since the marriage is said to be outside their first faith. Therefore, the best for these younger widows was to remarry. Otherwise, they might learn to be idle, gossiping from house to house.

Younger Widows to Remarry (5:14–15)

In verse 14, Paul writes βούλομαι οὖν νεωτέρας γαμεῖν, τεκνογονεῖν, οἰκοδεσποτεῖν, μηδεμίαν ἀφορμὴν διδόναι τῷ ἀντικειμένῳ λοιδορίας χάριν (Therefore I want younger widows to marry,

⁴⁶ John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, Ill: Victor Books, 1983), 743.

⁴⁷ T. Dillont Thornton., “Saying What They Should Not Say”: Reassessing the Gravity of the Problem of the Younger Widows (1 Tim. 5:11–15). *JETS* 59 no 1 (2016): 121-125..

⁴⁸ Jamieson Robert, Fausset. A.R and Brown David. *Commentary: Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, 1978), 1366.

to bear children and to manage their households, so as not to give the adversary an occasion of reproach). Paul gave the younger widows the liberty to marry and manage their households. In the Ancient world, widows were expected to remarry.⁴⁹ Paul seems to be giving general wisdom on the matter of remarriage. In verse 14c, Paul begins with a purpose clause as he instructs Timothy that younger widows should remarry and bear children and manage their household instead of gossiping. The verb οἰκοδεσποτεῖν is a present infinitive meaning ‘manage their household,’ the same word in NASB is rendered as “to rule one’s own house.”

Paul continues to instruct Timothy in verse 14d of 1 Timothy 5 that the reason why the young widows were to get married was “so as not to give the adversary an occasion of reproach.” By remarrying, these younger widows would not give the enemy an opportunity for slander. However, if they don’t marry and their passions lead them, they will be tempted to fall into sexual immorality and open a door of reproach. So, Paul recommends remarriage rather than burning with passion (1 Cor 7:8–9). Of course, he would also prefer they remain single without undivided devotion. Still, he knows that is not the reality for many young widows; hence he encourages them to avoid the worst sin of sexual immorality and other ungodly behaviors.

Able Believers to Assist Widows in their Families (5:16)

In verse 16a, Paul expands verses 4 and 8, which refer to children caring for their parents and grandparents. This clause ‘εἴ τις πιστὴ ἔχει χήρας, ἐπαρκεῖτω αὐταῖς’ is in the first-class condition because of the feature εἴ. The protasis “if clause” alludes that there could have been believing women who had widows in their families that needed support. The believer should care for these needy cases as a demonstration of faith in Christ. The reason was so that the church was not burdened. Paul repeats his words in verse 3 regarding the Ephesian church caring for the true widows. Paul argues that only those who were truly χήραις were to be cared for by the church. Paul instructed Timothy to encourage believing women and children to support their own widows so that the church could help those enlisted for support.

Summary

Paul emphasizes the need to care for genuine widows in 1 Timothy 5. First, children and grandchildren were exhorted to care for their parents and grandparents, and by doing so, they

⁴⁹ Winter *Providencia for the Widows of 1 Timothy 5:3–16*, 85.

will learn to practice godliness and relieve the church from the burden of caring for them. A true widow has no human dependants; she is alone and trusts in God for her provision. A widow who lives for pleasure is spiritually dead and is unqualified for the church's aid. Second, Christian families must care for their own widows. The family unit is critical to God; failing to care for one's family, especially one immediate family, is to deny one's faith and act worse than non-believers who, in some cases, provide for their own. Third, the church should assume responsibility for caring for a widow over sixty years of age who have evidence of a godly life. They must have practiced good works (brought up children well, welcomed strangers, washed the saint's feet, and relieved the afflicted). Fourth, the younger widows should not be enrolled in the church welfare because their sensual desires might overcome their dedication to Christ, thus bringing judgment on themselves. Finally, Paul instructs Timothy to encourage the believing women to support their own widows to relieve the church from such a category of widows.

Conclusion

The Bible teaches about taking care of widows. God presented himself as the husband to the widows; therefore, widow-care should be an essential aspect of every family and church. The modern church should heed the biblical call to care for widows who are truly widows (1 Tim. 5:3). Although the church should continue to care for those widows, this does not rule out any help that the church can give to the widows who are left alone through other circumstances. Therefore, churches should refocus on this ministry to develop programs that can help train the children and grandchildren to be responsible for taking care of their parents. The immediate family also needs to be encouraged to support and care for widows among them to demonstrate their faith in Christ (1 Tim. 5:16). Paul instructed Timothy and the church to enroll widows formerly married to one man (1 Tim. 5:9) and have a record of service to the body of Christ. Paul encouraged younger widows to remarry and manage their households (1 Tim 5:14); however, widows should remarry those in the Lord (1 Cor 7:39).

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