

**1 Timothy** Pastor Lou DeVizia

1 Timothy 5:3-16 Fellowship Bible Church; Woodbridge, NJ

**www.yourfamilychurch.com**

Introduction. This passage of scripture accomplishes two very practical things for ordering church life, one directly and the other by implication: 1) it adds a thorough set of instructions to the biblical admonishment to care for widows (James 1:27), providing for church and familial order and the stewardship of church resources; and 2) it teaches by implication that material assistance in general must be governed by wisdom and prudence, in this case with an actual written policy.

The first statement of the passage (v.3) issues a command to understand the *definition* of those who are "really" widows, distinguishing between them and those who are technically widows but because of certain circumstances not eligible for church support (that is, while supporting a widow might be proper, in some cases it is not proper for the *church's resources* to do so). From there, definitive terms are presented, firstly laying the responsibility for care upon a widow's family. It is most fitting before God that younger generations care for their own widows. It is just, it is right. Generally, what Scripture requires here for a widow to be considered for church support is that she be truly alone in the world, trusting only in God, and living a non-materialistic life: this is Paul's definition of a "real" widow. The absence of any of these circumstances raises questions about the legitimacy of need.

After establishing his definition, Paul gives three further *qualifications*. This is to say, even if a widow can be truly defined as such, there was still to be an examination of the fruit of her life (again, it is specifically *church support* that is in view - an *individual* may choose to apply different criteria, but a church, as a whole, has both an obligation to care and to discipline; both generosity and accountable stewardship are important; remember, an individual shares his *own* resources, a church shares *other people's* resources). Her age, her marital faithfulness, and her deeds are all to be taken into account.

Lastly, an *admonishment* is given to widows, particularly to those who do not meet the age qualification. Paul's encouragement: *remarry*. If youth is still possessed, a great deal can still be done in service to God as a wife and possibly even as a mother.

1. Verses 4-8 - Widows defined.

- vv.3-4, 8 - **really widows...** See comments in Introduction. **piety...** Greek word is *eusebien*, meaning "respect" with support in view. It is improper for **children** (first) or even **grandchildren** to *not* support the widows in their families and to allow them to become wards of the church (or any other institution, presumably). Paul is clear: this is a way for younger generations to **repay their parents** for all they have done for them, and it pleases **God** (and is consistent with the 5th Commandment). Paul is so adamant on this point that he pronounces the failure to comply to be an effective denial of **the faith** and even **worse** than what he would expect from the unbelieving world, a severe rebuke. *Also see Mark 7:10-13.*

- vv.5-6 - **really a widow...** Here now is Paul's three-point definition of true widowhood, a widowhood that is appropriately considered for church support: 1) **left alone**, that is, no children, grandchildren, etc., who can help them; 2) **trusts in God**, demonstrated by faithfulness and diligence in **prayers** (presumably among the church body, learning and remembering the needs of others before the Lord); and 3) she does not live **in pleasure** (Greek: *spatalosa*, self-indulgence). If any of these three terms are missing, the widow's need does not rise to the level of *institutional church support*.

- v.7 - **they... blameless...** The "they" here refers to the church as a whole. Paul is concerned about the testimony of the church's life as a body. Widows should not be aided *indiscriminately*. Love is manifested in both charity and discipline.

## 2. Verses 9-10 - Widows qualified.

- vv.9-10 - These verses present a clear, three-point list of qualifications (the third point has sub-points). This is a first-century *church benevolence policy*. Such policies are very wise indeed. They provide for charity while displaying prudence, stewardship and understanding. If a widow met the definition of a true widow (see previous section), then she needed to be 1) at least **sixty years old**; 2) the **wife of one man**, that is, a one-man woman, i.e., faithful to her deceased husband in their life together; and 3) a **diligently** committed laborer for the Lord, **well reported for good works**. Several examples of good works are given (*a list godly women of all ages would do well to be acquainted with!*), concerning ministry to **children, strangers, the saints** and the **afflicted**. In essence: *older women, holy women, fruitful women*.

## 3. Verses 11-16 - Widows admonished.

- vv.11-12 - **younger widows... wanton against Christ... condemnation...** Since a widow who was supported by the church was necessarily of complete dedication to the Lord (vv.5, 10), Paul knew a younger one was especially vulnerable to backing out of that commitment, especially if she met a man whom she might marry. This is not evil of course, but the shifting of her responsibilities from church to her husband could be perceived to be an abandonment of the faith.

- v.13 - in addition to the reasonableness of vv.11-12, there are the dangers of idleness and gossip, both damaging evils.

- v.14 - Paul's admonishment to younger widows is that they remarry. They can be of great use to the Lord as wives, and He may even yet bless them with children.

- v.15 - This was already a problem in the Ephesian church.

- v.16 - The conclusion of the matter: care for widows appropriately without unduly burdening the church.