

THE RESPONSIBILITIES TO CHRISTIAN WIDOWS 1 TIMOTHY 05:03–16

Introduction

What is the children's responsibility to their widowed parents? What is the believer's and the church's responsibility to the Christian widows under their care? These are the all important questions of this passage.

- I. Christian widows are to be honoured (v. 3-8).
- II. The children and their parents (v. 4-8).
- III. The church and its organization of widows (v. 9-10).
- IV. The church and the younger widows and idleness (v. 11-15).
- V. The believer is to take care of the widows in his own family (v. 16).

I. *1 Timothy 05:03 Christian Widows and Elderly Parents Are to Be Honoured*

Christian widows are to be honoured. Honour means to respect and esteem, but it also means to consider and give due care. It has the idea of looking after and caring for, of giving material help. All Christian widows are to be honoured, respected and esteemed by the church. But note the phrase "widows who are really in need." This limits the material support of the church. Not all widows need help. Some widows have family and estates that can help them. The widows who have no family and inadequate finances are those who are to be helped and supported by the church. They are the widows who are to be honoured with the material support of the church.

II. *1 Timothy 05:04–08 Widows, Children and Aged Parents*

The children and their parents. Note four significant points.

1. Children are to care for their parents and grandparents. This is a strong statement. In fact, the very first duty of a child is to be pious at home, that is...
 - to live for Christ in the home.
 - to be responsible in caring for his own family.

A true believer is a Christian at home before he is a Christian any place else. His first duty as a Christian is to love and care for his own family, and this includes his parents and grandparents. His parents and grandparents loved and took care of him when he was a child; therefore, he is to return the love and care when they are no longer able to take care of themselves.

Note the declaration: this is "pleasing to God." No other action is pleasing to God. A Christian child must love and take care of the widowed parents or else they receive the disapproval of God (cp. v. 8).

2. Widowed parents who are true Christians are to live above reproach. Who are “widows who are really in need,” the persons who are to be cared for by the church?

=> The person who is “left all alone” (memonomene): left completely alone; without husband, children or close kin.

=> The person who puts her hope in God. The Greek says who “has set her hope on God”; who has “placed her hope [and keeps it] on God” (A.T. Robertson. *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. 4, p. 584). Note what God declares: “Your widows too can trust in me” (Jer 49:11).

=> The person who continues night and day to pray.

The widow who really trusts God and focuses her life and attention upon praying day and night — that widow is a true Christian, a person who is focused upon Christ and His mission just as the church is. Therefore, the church is to look after and take care of this dear saint of God. But note the contrast: some widows live in pleasure; that is, they give themselves over to the flesh and the world. They party, get drunk and live immoral lives. These are not to be supported by the church. The church’s energy and resources are *not to be used* to indulge and give license to worldliness and sin. Such a woman is “dead even while she lives.” She is *dead* to God and to the things of God. Her mind is upon her clubs and parties, the world and the flesh (sinful nature) not upon the Lord and His church and the desperate needs of a dying world.

3. Both widowed parents and children are to obey these instructions. The reason is clearly stated: so that they can be blameless before God. We shall all be held accountable...

- for children: how they treat their widowed and aged parents.
- for widowed parents: how they live when widowed and aged, whether righteous or immoral, godly or ungodly.

We must both live obeying God and doing exactly what He says. We shall either be declared *blameless* and acceptable to God or else guilty of sin and unacceptable to God.

4. Children are accountable to God. This is a frightening declaration. It clearly shows just how important God considers our treatment of widows. If a child does not take care of his family, especially those within his own household (meaning immediate family — wife, children, parents and grandparents), two things are true of him.

=> He denies the faith.

=> He is worse than an unbeliever.

An unbeliever is a person who rejects Christ and sometimes even opposes Christ. He denies God and everything about God. The point is this: a person who does not take care of his parents (or anyone else of his household) stands opposed to God. He even denies the very existence of God by his behaviour, for he shows that he does not fear God nor God’s command to respect and care for his parents. How we treat our aged

parents is of critical importance to God. God holds us accountable and will judge us for how we treat our fathers and mothers when they become old.

Exo 20:12 “Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.”

Lev 19:3 “Each of you must respect his mother and father, and you must observe my Sabbaths. I am the LORD your God.”

Deut 27:16 “Cursed is the man who dishonours his father or his mother.” Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”

Prov 30:17 “The eye that mocks a father, that scorns obedience to a mother, will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley, will be eaten by the vultures.”

Mat 15:4 For God said, ‘Honour your father and mother’ and ‘Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.’

James 1:27 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.

III. 1 Timothy 05:09–10 The Church and Its Organization of Widows

Apparently, the early church did what any wise church does: organized its most spiritual widows for ministry. Widows who are committed to Christ have a great potential for ministry. Once they have recovered from the loss of their spouse, their commitment, energy, time and talents can concentrate upon Christ and the ministry of the church. The early church recognized this fact and organized the widows for a very special ministry to the needy. But note: the ministry of organization had high spiritual standards.

- ⇒ The widow had to be at least sixty years old. This would mean that she had probably walked with Christ and proven her faith for some years.
- ⇒ The widow must have been faithful to her husband. By this, she would be a strong example of purity and trustworthiness.
- ⇒ The widow must have a strong testimony of good works or deeds.
- ⇒ The widow must have reared and nourished her children as she should have: in love and care, correction and discipline, and in Christ and His church.
- ⇒ The widow must have been a hospitable person, opening and using her home as a ministering centre for Christ. The inns of that day were “notoriously dirty, notoriously expensive, and notoriously immoral” (William Barclay. *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, p. 128). Therefore, Christians who were willing to open their homes to strangers traveling about showed an open heart for ministry.
- ⇒ The widow must have washed the saints’ feet. The people of that day wore sandals and the roads and paths were dirty. Therefore, it was the common practice to have a

bowl of water at the entrance of the home for guests to wash their feet. The idea is that the spiritual woman would have a humble spirit. She would have never allowed a servant to greet other Christians into her home; she would have done that herself. She would have humbly met them and cleaned their feet herself. This would show that she was willing to do the most humble and menial task in ministering to people.

⇒ The widow must have helped those in trouble, the afflicted and distressed, the suffering. This would show that she was tender and compassionate.

⇒ The widow must have devoted herself to all kinds of good deeds.

Thought 1. Every church needs to organize its widows for ministry, especially those who love the Lord and have lived for Him and are committed to the church. They can...

- be a strong example in purity and trustworthiness.
- provide a strong testimony of good works or deeds.
- minister to the children of the church and community, both the orphans and those with parents.
- minister enormously through hospitality using their homes as an outreach centre.
- serve in the most humble and menial tasks of the church.
- minister to the suffering and distressed.
- be used in all the works and ministries of the church.

Mat 5:16 *“In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”*

Rom 15:1 *We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.*

Gal 6:2 *Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.*

Gal 6:10 *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

Eph 6:7 *Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men.*

1 Tim 6:8 *Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.*

Titus 2:7 *In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness.*

Heb 10:24 *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.*

Heb 13:16 *And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.*

1 Pet 2:12 *Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*

IV. 1 Timothy 05:11–15 The Church, the Younger Widows and Idleness

Two significant things are said here about young widows and the early church.

1. Young widows were not allowed to serve in the church's *order of widows*. The reason given is that they might wish to marry again. This tells us that the church's *order of widows* made a vow to serve God and His church for the remainder of their lives, never again marrying.

The picture is this: a young Christian lady whose husband had just died would be gripped with bitter sorrow.

She would find her most comforting solace in God Himself and in her friends at church. She could be subject to the hasty impulse of dedicating her life to God as a widow — and requesting that she be added to the church's *order of widows*. The exhortation to refuse her request is to prevent a hasty and impulsive decision. Such a decision would bring judgment to the young widow at a later date when she might wish to break her vow to God and marry again (See outline, 1 Cor 7:8-9; 7:39-40). If she broke her vow, she would displease God, stir criticism and lower the meaning of making vows to God and to the ministry of the church.

Another problem might also arise. Young widows have not had time to become all that mature in the Lord. Therefore, as they went from house to house in their ministry, they might tend...

- to idle time away.
- to gossip.
- to be busybodies.
- to say “things they should not say and [talk] of things they should not mention” (Amplified New Testament).

2 Th 3:11 *We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies.*

1 Tim 5:13 *Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to.*

1 Pet 4:15 *If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.*

2. Young widows should, therefore, marry.

- a. They should marry lest they cause immoral gossip.

1 Tim 5:14 *So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander.*

Thought 1. It is not wrong for a young widow to remain single if she can live for Christ and the church. But if she cannot dedicate her life to Christ and the ministry, then she should marry.

- b. They should marry lest they turn away to follow Satan (v. 15). Note that this verse says that some in Ephesus had turned away and gone after the world and its immoral and unclean lifestyle.

Luke 8:13 “Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.”

Heb 10:38 But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.

James 1:8 He is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

2 Pet 2:20 If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.

2 Pet 3:17 Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position.

1 John 2:15-16 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world.

1 John 2:19 They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.

Psa 52:3 You love evil rather than good, falsehood rather than speaking the truth.

Jer 14:10 This is what the LORD says about this people: “They greatly love to wander; they do not restrain their feet. So the LORD does not accept them; he will now remember their wickedness and punish them for their sins.

V. 1 Timothy 05:16 The Church and Widows

The believer is to take care of the widows in his or her family. The church is not to be charged with the care of widows if there are living relatives. The responsibility is that of the families.

Isa 1:17 Learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.

John 1:27 “He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.” ■