

1 Timothy Chapter 5 (vv.1-16)

This chapter is concerned with instruction to the different *individuals* (generations) that comprise the house of God – *men* (5.1), *women* (5.2), *widows* (5.3-16), *elders* (5.17-25) and *slaves* (6.1-2). The household of God is one large Christian family where courteous relationships are enjoyed and maintained. Clearly, **every individual** has an important contribution to the effective testimony of the assembly. Paul is still concerned with the practical outworking of godliness, that nothing might be allowed that would be an occasion for reproach to hinder the testimony of the saints and *dishonour* the name and truth of God (6.1).

The **Christian Family** [vv.1-2]

v.1: Every local assembly should have the spirit of a family, where respect and affection are held for every member (3.15; Ephesians 2.19; Galatians 6.10). The word '**elder**' is *singular* (not *plural*, as vv.17, 19) and thus refers not to an overseer but an older man in the assembly. If the occasion demanded, such an individual was not to be sharply '**rebuked**' (to 'beat' or 'hammer' with words) but rather 'intreated' as a father-figure, i.e. exhorted in reverence and tenderness in keeping with the dignity of one advanced in years (Daniel 4.27). "*A right rebuke in a wrong spirit is simply meeting the flesh in the flesh*" (Smith). *Leviticus 19.32: You must stand up in the presence of the aged, honour the presence of an elder.* Though Timothy laboured in Ephesus with apostolic authority, he was not to patronise or employ a spirit of superiority in relation to the 'young men'. They were to be treated lovingly as equals, like 'brethren' in the flesh.

v.2: Timothy was also to act towards '**elder (older) women**' as a dutiful son would a mother (cf. John 19.26; Romans 16.13), and towards 'younger' women as 'sisters' implying protective care and respect. This would require 'all purity' suggesting *inward* propriety of thought and *outward* purity of action.

The **Charge** concerning *Widows* [vv.3-8]

The attention given to widows is not surprising given it was this which first brought a spirit of contention into the early church (Acts 6.1-7). Widows are of great value to God (Psalm 68.5). They were not to be degraded or disparaged (Exodus 22.22) but provided with tithes of the increase of the land (Deuteronomy 14.28-29). In first-century Jewish culture, widows were usually poor, and often destitute, without any means of earning a living, being barred from employment outside the home (cf. Mark 12.41-44; Luke 18.1-8). There were no social institutions to provide for widows, so local synagogues often collected goods and money to distribute. It seems early Christians continued in this tradition.

v.3: Paul describes different categories of widows. **1.** 'Widows indeed' *with* family support (v.4). **2.** 'Widows indeed' *without* family support (v.5). **3.** Widows of 'pleasure' (v.6). **4.** 'Younger widows' (vv.11-15). A '**widow indeed**' was a *real* widow in the sense of one who was *truly in need*, and despite having suffered loss, was living the widowed life in a God-honouring manner (cf. vv.5, 9-10). She was a great contrast to the widow of pleasure (v.6) who was a widow by name, but not in *character* (or action). The 'widow indeed' was to be '**honoured**' (*tima*) – her worth being recognised by financial support from the church. Note. John the Baptist was a 'prophet indeed' (Mark 11.32) and we should be 'disciples indeed' through full obedience to the word of God, not merely disciples in name only (John 8.31). **v.4:** However, the primary responsibility of a widow's financial support lay with the '**children**' or 'nephews' (lit. 'born out of' probably meaning any family descendants such as *grandchildren*). They must demonstrate 'piety' (godliness) toward their own 'household' (family) by 'requiting' (to *repay* or *recompense*) their parents (includes all living ancestors) for the love and care bestowed upon them in earlier years. Such actions are not only morally good but delight the heart of God.

v.5: However, 'widows indeed' who have no family support are '**desolate**' (solitary). Such a widow *does not* look to the church for support and *cannot* look to their family for support – instead, she looks to God alone, having permanently settled her *confidence* and *hope* on Him. She continues in '**supplications**' (*deesis*, to present specific, urgent petitions to God in recognition of one's own weakness and inability) and '**prayers**' (from *two* Greek words meaning 'face to face' and 'a wish' or 'desire'). This is done '**night and day**', a Jewish idiom to express what is constant and characteristic. The order suggests her *private* exercise (night) takes precedence over the *public* (day). **v.6:** In contrast, there are some widows who lead lives of '**pleasure**' in self-indulgent luxury, with little or no thought of God (cf. James 5.5). She seeks to forget her sorrow by pandering to the desires of the flesh. Whilst she is alive *physically*, she is dead toward God showing no evidence of *spiritual* life. Contrast the 'widow indeed' who is dead to the pleasures of the flesh, but alive in her confidence Godward. FB Hole notes, "There is nothing more deadening than self-indulgence in pleasure. The pleasure may be life of a worldly sort but it is death spiritually, for the soul is thereby deadened towards God and His things."

v.7: The truth of vv.3-6 was to be 'commanded' to the widows, their families, indeed, *all* the saints that they might be '**blameless**' or *irreproachable* in respect of these matters (cf. 3.2; 6.14). **v.8:** One such source of reproach would be any believer who failed to '**provide**' or 'perceive and make material provision beforehand' for members of his own

household. Such was worse than an **'infidel'** (lit. 'faithless') for even the unsaved *know* and *recognise* their responsibilities towards family members. Thus, for a believer to fail to do so is tantamount to a practical denial of 'the faith'. Christianity is not a matter of *saying* only (preaching) but *doing* (practice).

The Character of Widows Indeed [vv.9-10]

v.9: Two main classes of widows have already been identified. Jim Allen notes, "*Widows indeed – those without family support. Widows technically, but not indeed – those with family support. Now the apostle takes the first class and subdivides it into two groups. These are distinguished as widows to be enrolled (vv. 9-10), and those not to be enrolled (vv. 11-15).*" The local assembly at Ephesus held a register of those widows who were afforded ongoing financial support by the church. This is described as 'being **taken into the number**' (to be *enrolled* or *selected* for membership in a group). Since there were clearly many widows who sought such financial support, Paul enumerates stringent qualifications. First, they must not be under *sixty* years of age. In the Roman Empire, this was the age at which a person was considered 'old'. Such individuals were less likely to yield to sensual desires, and beyond the normal working age and/or age of remarriage. Second, she must have been the **'wife of one man'**, i.e. a loyal wife, faithful to her one husband, having maintained her sexual purity (cf. 3.2, 12). **v.10:** Third, others must consistently 'bear witness' (testify) of her *morally* (and *spiritually*) beautiful **'good works'** (*kalos*). These works are exemplified in v.10 and contrasted in vv.11-14. She has given herself to the dignity of motherhood, having 'brought up' (nourished) children. She has 'lodged strangers' (given to hospitality, Acts 12.12; 16.14-15) and 'washed the saints' feet' (displaying a humble spirit, prepared to do the most menial service for others, Romans 16.2). She has sought to 'relieve the afflicted' by driving away the difficulties of those squeezed by the circumstances of life. In summary, she has devoted herself diligently to *every* and *any* expression of good for the benefit of others (*agathos*). Note. A widow indeed who had not borne any children would not necessarily be excluded from the list. It was exemplary. Also, being 'desolate' any children had obviously since died.

The Concern of Younger Widows [vv.11-15]

v.11: In contrast, younger widows were to be 'declined' (**refused**) a place on the list of ongoing financial provision. As a young widow, she would have a growing desire and determination to marry again – stimulated by a strong physical (sensual) yearning (**'wax wanton'**). Such a consuming desire could outweigh her devotion to Christ, "leading her away" from Him (NET). Gordon Fee explains as follows, "*Their desire to remarry tends to outweigh their devotion to Christ, to the point that they will allow sensual desire to supersede that devotion. What seems to be envisioned is a remarriage that includes abandoning her faith in Christ; that is, her sensual desire is more important than her faith in Christ to the point that she would marry a nonbeliever in order to fulfill that desire.*" **v.12:** This deliberate action incurs the condemnatory judgment ('damnation' is too strong) of the word of God (cf. 1 Corinthians 7.39). Christ is given *second* place, the young widow having **'cast off'** (or 'regarded as nothing') her *primary* (total) commitment to Christ as Lord – her 'first faith'. Sadly, in approximately thirty years' time, the Lord Jesus would describe the saints at Ephesus as having left their 'first (best) love', the Greek word *protos* suggesting what is first in *quality*.

v.13: Furthermore, the financial support of the local church could encourage these young widows to be **'idle'**, i.e. leisurely and lazy, and go about from 'house to house' gossiping. The word **'tattler'** literally means to 'boil up' or 'throw up bubbles', describing people who indulge in empty and foolish talk, spewing out whatever comes to mind. As **'busybodies'** (*periergos*) they pay attention to matters that do not concern them and say things which are not proper to mention. The word literally translates as 'around work' almost suggesting the circumvention of genuine spiritual work to fulfil her feminine social interests. *Sounds like Little Miss Lazy, Little Miss Chatterbox and Little Miss Nosey!* **v.14:** Paul's spiritual advice for these young widows is to **'marry'** again. The salvation and preservation of this widow's spiritual life is found in marriage, *bearing* and *raising* children and household responsibilities (2.15). "The contemporary view that children are an inconvenience that cramp one's lifestyle is repulsive to the Lord." To **'guide the house'** describes the overall administration and management of household affairs. If she would engage whole-heartedly in these activities, it would provide less opportunity for any 'adversary' (opponent) to speak 'reproachfully' (verbal abuse). **v.15:** Sadly, in yielding to Satan's temptations, some young widows had already **'turned aside'** (to *twist* as dislocated limbs) from the right path of devotion to Christ and aligned themselves with Satan's will. Jim Allen: "*They were off the highroad of Christian testimony and had fallen in behind Satan. Moral and spiritual disaster are depicted in the aorist tense and passive voice of the verb "turned aside" used to describe a moment when the pressure upon them became too severe; circumstances and unrestrained desires led to a wrong step and they found themselves following not Christ but Satan.*"

The Conclusion of the Charge [v.16]

v.16: A widow should be financially supported (**'relieved'**) by her relatives, especially children or grandchildren and not become a burden on the financial resources of the local church. If, however, the 'widow indeed' was 'desolate' (v.5) having no family to support her, then the church must meet her material needs.