

EXCELLENCE IN MINISTRY

Finishing Well—Doing What’s Best in the Challenges of Ministry

What about Widows?

1 Timothy 5:3–16



LET’S BEGIN HERE

For the individual follower of Christ, the single most practical book in the Bible is probably James. For the church, it’s got to be 1 Timothy. And as we’ve seen throughout our study, Paul has practically left no proverbial stone unturned, addressing a wide variety of issues confronting the church. We’ve also seen that these issues are just as relevant in the twenty-first century as they were in the first century. But just when we think Paul has exhausted all important topics, he comes up with one more—how the church ought to treat widows (1 Timothy 5:3–16). What he said might surprise us.



LET’S DIG DEEPER

1. Observations Regarding Widows

Paul never mentioned it, but underlying his instructions about widows are two important biblical themes. One recalls the fifth commandment to the children of Israel—honor your fathers and mothers (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16), and the second recalls the example of how God “executes justice for . . . the widow” (Deuteronomy 10:18). As Paul would tell Timothy, in some cases families must cease shirking their responsibilities, and in others the church must step up its care to those who are “widows indeed” (1 Timothy 5:3).



Quotable

There will always be more needs than a local church can meet. Every good opportunity is not a call from God.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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DOORWAY TO HISTORY

A Brief Biblical History on Widows

In the ancient warrior culture of Sparta, only two groups were awarded marked graves: soldiers who died in battle and mothers who died giving birth to sons. Spartan women were esteemed like goddesses only because of their ability to bear sons. Similar to other ancient cultures, women were defined by their relationship to men—fathers, husbands, and sons. Single women, widows, and the childless were second-class citizens.

This is not the view presented in the Bible in which women are valued for who they are, period. In fact, those without husbands or children are deemed worthy of special devotion, honor, and care. In the Old Testament, God described Himself as “a judge for the widows” (Psalm 68:5). And anyone who took advantage of widows received God’s wrath (Isaiah 1:23; Jeremiah 7:6–7; 22:3–6; Zechariah 7:8–12; Malachi 3:5), including His own people (Exodus 22:22–24). In the New Testament, Jesus fulfilled God’s commands by showing compassion on the widow of Nain, raising her son from the dead (Luke 7:11–15). He commended both the persistent widow who badgered the unjust judge (18:1–8) and the widow who gave her all to God (Mark 12:38–44). And on the cross, He cared for His widowed mother by placing her under the protection of John (John 19:26–27).

The early church learned the lesson from the Old Testament and Jesus’ example. The Jerusalem church cared for the widows in their midst, even assigning seven godly men to that specific ministry (Acts 6:1–3). From there, the practice of caring for widows spread with the spread of the gospel.

2. Responsibilities to Widows (1 Timothy 5:3–16)

By the time Paul wrote to Timothy in AD 63, the custom of caring for widows was being abused. The abuse wasn’t perpetrated *against* widows; it was perpetrated *by* widows and widows’ families. Every widow in the Ephesian church was being supported by the congregation, and that placed a heavy burden on the ministry. In 1 Timothy 5:3–16, Paul prescribed a policy on how to correct this abusive situation.



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LET’S LIVE IT

When it comes to caring for widows, it’s easy to be pulled by emotions into unwise decisions. That’s why Paul’s instructions in 1 Timothy 5:3–16 are so helpful. And so are these practical reminders:

Caring for one’s dependent parents is a serious, scriptural responsibility.

Grief doesn’t always result in godliness.

The church is never expected to support everyone in need.

A full, busy life is much safer than an idle one.

In light of this study, what is your opinion about placing elderly widows in nursing or retirement homes?

Single mothers are, in a way, “widows.” What is the church’s responsibility to them, and what ministries does your church provide?



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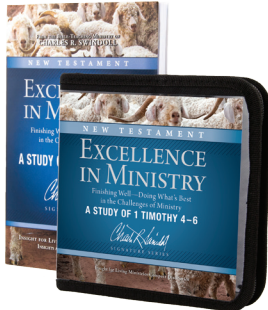
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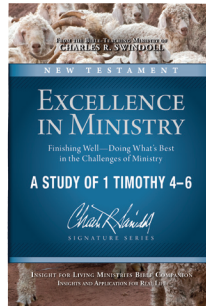
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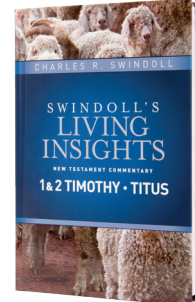
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