

1 Timothy 5:1-16 “Life in the Household of God”
Deuteronomy 26
Psalm 92

(October 9, 2011)

How important is it to care for widows and orphans?

When God brings Israel into the land,
they are supposed to bring the firstfruits to the LORD every year.
Deuteronomy 14 had said that for two years, they were supposed to bring the tithe
to the place that God would choose (at the Feast of Booths),
and then they were to rejoice and celebrate before the LORD,
making sure to include the Levites, the widows and the orphans.
But, in the third year, “the year of tithing” they are supposed to give the entire tithe
to the widows, orphans, and Levites.
Deuteronomy 14:28-29 says that this should be stored up in all the towns,
with the idea that this becomes the “poor relief” for those in need.

In addition, the Israelites were supposed to leave “gleanings” for widows and orphans
so that they would always have enough to eat.

Deuteronomy 26 is the conclusion of Moses great sermon on the Ten Commandments
(Deuteronomy 6-26).

And in conclusion, Moses lays out a “liturgy” for the firstfruits and the tithe,
with an emphasis on providing for the Levites, the widows and the orphans.

Israel had been treated harshly by the Egyptians.

But the LORD had delivered them from oppression and slavery.

And the sermon that began,

“Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one,
and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, and with all your strength,” (Dt 6:4-5)
now concludes with an emphasis on loving your neighbor –
and particularly, with loving the most needy of your neighbors,
widows and orphans.

Throughout the prophets, the number one reason why judgment is coming upon Israel
is idolatry: Israel has not loved the LORD – but has turned to other gods –
but the number one *evidence* of Israel’s turning away from the LORD
is how Israel has treated the poor – especially the widow and the orphan.

Remember how Moses said it at the end of Dt 26?

“And the LORD...will set you in praise and in fame and in honor
high above all nations that he has made,
and that you shall be a people holy to the LORD your God, as he promised.”

Our Psalm of response calls us to give thanks to God Most High
for his steadfast love and faithfulness.
God will do as he has promised and establish “the righteous.”
“They are planted in the house of the LORD; they flourish in the courts of our God.”

And that is what God has done in Jesus Christ.
And because that is what our Father has done through his Son,
therefore, the Spirit of his Son has come upon the church,
so that the church might be what Israel failed to be.

Sing Psalm 92
Read 1 Timothy 5:1-16

Paul said at the end of chapter 3:
“I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay,
you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God,
which is the church of the living God,
a pillar and buttress of the truth.” (3:14-15)

We keep seeing that Paul insists on *both* doctrine *and* practice.
The church is the pillar and buttress of the truth –
not simply because she *teaches* the truth,
but *also* because of how she *practices* the truth.

1. Pastoral Care in the Church (v1-2)

¹ *Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, ²older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.*

In verses 1-2 Paul talks about what pastoral care should look like in the church.
The church should act like a family –
and Timothy, in particular, should set an example
by treating the congregation as fathers, brothers, mothers, and sisters.

Paul here uses the word “presbuteros” – which means “elder” or “older man.”
Given the contrast between “older man” and “younger man,”
it is likely that Paul is using “presbuteros” in the generic sense,
“older man.”

After all, in chapter 4 Paul referred to Timothy as a “deacon of Christ” –
which probably referred to the generic sense of “minister”
rather than to Timothy’s particular office in the church.

Paul says that Timothy should not “rebuke” an older man.
The word actually means “to strike” – although it has a common figurative use,
“to denounce or rebuke.”

Timothy may need to exhort an older man –
but he should not rebuke him sharply.

And likewise, he should encourage or exhort younger men as brothers.

Notice that Paul does not encourage Timothy to think of younger men as “children” –
but as brothers.

While Timothy is to set an example for the believers,
he is not supposed to exalt himself over the brethren.

And so he should treat older women as mothers –
and younger women as sisters – “with all purity.”

We saw a few weeks ago that women are to dress modestly – not extravagantly.
I pointed out then that the Bible never condemns women for making men lust.
Certainly Proverbs condemns the woman who seeks to lead other men astray,
but it is a man’s responsibility to treat a woman with all purity.

And Paul says that the way to do this is to treat them as “sisters.”

How do you do this?

By remembering that her beauty is not “for you.”

Her beauty is *there*.

All people are created in the image of God
and reflect him in various ways.

We saw in chapter 4 that Paul says that

“everything created by God is good,
and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,
for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.” (4:4-5)

so also I should exhort and encourage the younger women
“as sisters, in all purity.”

God has created us as a new family in Christ Jesus.

But Paul wants to guard against the dangers of sexual immorality,
and so he emphasizes the importance of purity in Timothy’s relationship
with the younger women in the church.

That’s why I don’t meet alone with women for counseling.

We can talk on the telephone, or in a public place (Pastor in the Pub works fine –
the whole staff knows me [and Ginger], so it’s a very safe place!),
but usually, I counsel with Ginger.

In verse 3, Paul turns to widows – which will be his focus for the rest of our passage.

“Widow” (ξηρα) in Greek normally refers to a woman whose husband has died,
but it can refer to any woman whose husband is “out of the picture.”

A divorcee can be called a “widow” in Greek,

but it normally refers to a woman whose husband has died.

2. “Honor Widows”: in the Home and in the Church (v3-8)

³*Honor widows who are truly widows.*

Paul starts by saying “honor widows who are truly widows.”

This requires a couple of observations.

First, “honor” probably refers both to how you treat her,
and what you provide for her (“an honorarium” as it were).

Plainly, the rest of the passage makes it clear
that we are talking about the financial care of widows –
not just the attitude that we have to them.

Second, Paul is not talking about *all* widows, but those who are “truly widows.”

A “true widow” is one who has no one who can care for her.

Think back to Moses’ statement in Deuteronomy 26 –
and to the prophets condemnations of Israel for how they treated widows.

We’ve spoken quite a bit about Ahab and Jezebel in this series.

Ahab was the worst king in Israel’s history.

And Kings tells us that he was so awful – in part –
because his wife, Jezebel, incited him to Baal worship and murder.

Well, after the death of Ahab, Jezebel was a widow!

Does that mean that Jehu, the new king, should “care” for her?

No – Jehu ordered her execution – and was right for doing it!

So just because a woman’s husband has died does not mean that she should receive the “honor”
(the financial support) of a “true widow.”

In verses 5-6 Paul explains who is “truly a widow”:

⁵*She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications
and prayers night and day,*

A true widow – namely, the sort of widow the church should support –
is one who is “left all alone” – there is no one to take care of her;
she has “set her hope on God” – who has promised to care for widows and orphans;
and she “continues in supplications and prayers night and day” –
think of Anna in Luke 2 who fasted and prayed in the temple.

Throughout history the church has put a high priority on this.

You may recall that the calling of the “Seven” in Acts 6
was due to the importance of caring for the widows of the church.

A true widow is destitute – and her only hope is God.

Such a widow is precisely the sort of widow that God will rescue and care for.

⁶*but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.*

In other words, a widow who is constantly indulging her selfish desires is not a “true widow.”
She may have survived her husband outwardly,
but inwardly she is already dead.

So Paul’s category of “true widow” is one who should be financially supported by the church.

But before the church enrolls her on the list of widows,
Paul has a question – and this is the focus of verses 4 and 8:

⁴*But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God.*

Here we see “godliness” (eusebeia) popping up again!
The mystery of godliness – the secret of piety –
is the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus.
Jesus is the incarnation of godliness – he is piety come in the flesh!
And in his resurrection, piety has ascended to the right hand of the Father.

And in the preaching of the gospel – in the message that has gone out to all the world –
the mystery of godliness has come to you.

And now you are called to live in a manner that is consistent with the gospel.
You are called to *learn to show godliness* to your own household.

I think the key word here is the word “learn.”
This is the word behind the whole “discipleship” idea in scripture.
Paul does not just say “take care of your parents” –
but *learn* to show godliness to your own household.

If Jesus *is* the mystery of godliness,
then your practice of godliness should resemble him.

And think about Jesus:
not only did he raise the widow’s son from the dead,
but even on the cross he took thought for providing for his own mother,
by commending her to the care of his disciple, John.

Even so, the first way that the church is to care for widows
is that Christians are to care for their own family members.

In verse 7, Paul drives this home:

⁷*Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach.*

Notice that Paul does not see this as optional!

You are *commanded* to provide for your relatives.

If your mother is in need – *you* must do something about it!

And in verse 8, Paul points out that this is broader than *just* your mother:

⁸*But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*

Why does Paul say this?

Because the church is the household of God, the pillar and buttress of the truth.

The living God who is the defender of widows and orphans in their distress
has established his church to be a place where his kingdom is exhibited.

So if you do not provide for those of your own household,
then you *are not* a member of his household!

The language of “household” suggests that Paul is including here
not only your parents, but also your servants – others who are dependent on you.

If you are part of God’s household,

then you should treat those under your care the way that your heavenly Father treats you.

3. The “Order” of True Widows (v9-16)

In verses 9-16 Paul then turns to those widows who have no one else to care for them,
and he talks about “enrolling” these widows.

Some debate about whether there is an “order of widows” –

there is plainly an “order” of widows, in the sense that there are widows
who were cared for by the church;

but there is no indication that one had to be enrolled in order to be considered a widow!

⁹*Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband,^[a]¹⁰ and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work.*

Notice that the requirements parallel those for the bishop:

wife of one husband

reputation for good works

has brought up children

has shown hospitality

has washed the feet of the saints

has cared for the afflicted

has devoted herself to every good work

I pointed out when we looked at bishops and deacons
that the qualifications for bishops and deacons
are simply that the bishops and deacons be exemplary Christians.

Here we see that the order of widows is to consist of exemplary Christians as well.

And ladies – you can see here what Paul calls you to do:
are you faithful to your husband?
do you show hospitality? (love to strangers)
do you care for the afflicted?
do you devote yourself to every good work?

Not – “are you perfect?”
But, “does your life reflect the mystery of godliness?
- the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus?”

It is this sort of woman who should be enrolled on the list of widows.

I think that Paul would say that we should help other widows –
but we should not “enroll” them
as widows who are supported entirely by the church;
because Paul seems to have a particular vision
of what these widows are supposed to be doing.

And that is also why Paul has an age limit on the “order” of widow.

Verses 11-15 make clear that “enrolling” a widow puts her under some sort of obligation:

¹¹But refuse to enroll younger widows, for when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry ¹²and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith.

Modern commentators are often eager to deny any connection to the rise of monastic practices,
but George Knight says that we should recognize what is there!

Paul says that enrolling a widow includes the requirement that she will not marry again.
If a widow does enroll, and then later gets married,
Paul goes so far as to say, that her passions have drawn her away from Christ,
and she incurs condemnation – judgment – for having *abandoned* her former faith
As he puts it in verse 15,
this is nothing less than “straying after Satan”!

The “order of widow” plainly is not just a list of widows in need.

The “order of widow” includes a commitment on their part *not* to marry –
a vow – if you will –
that they will devote themselves to Christ and the service of the church.

Now, you can see that this is the root of the idea of the monastic vow.

But you can also see that Paul would be *furiosus* at the idea of *young people* taking this vow.

“Refuse to enroll younger widows!”

She may *think* that she is ready to devote herself to the service of Christ,
but she may not be enrolled.

Why?

¹³*Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not.*

As we talk about “how to help without hurting”
we should note that Paul says that the “honor” of full financial support
should be reserved for those who are godly and helpless – *and old*.
He says, in effect, “you don’t want to encourage a ‘welfare mentality.’”
You don’t want all these young widows getting a handout –
because that is a recipe for disaster!

We’ve been talking about what “women’s ministry” should look like at MCPC.

Verse 13 is Paul’s nightmare!

Women who become idlers – going from house to house –
as gossips and busybodies.

Do you want to destroy a church?

Have a women’s ministry that loses sight of the mystery of godliness!

I’ve seen that happen.

I’ve seen what happens when women share “prayer requests” that are really just gossip;
when women say nasty things about each other (or their husbands –
or other peoples’ husbands);
all cloaked, of course, in the guise of “seeking wisdom and counsel”!

And it’s not just women!

I was having dinner with a fellow pastor last spring,

and on the way home, he said to me,

“it was so refreshing to spend an evening with a fellow pastor
without any of the criticism and tearing down of others that I so often hear.”

Paul does not say that younger widows *must* marry.

His wording makes it clear that this is only his *preference*:

¹⁴*So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander.* ¹⁵*For some have already strayed after Satan.*

A couple explanations:

- 1) remember that we are talking about *poor* widows here
those who need financial support.
If you cannot support yourself as a young widow,
then marry.
- 2) Paul says that these widows should not only marry and bear children,
but also “manage their households.”

The word here “oikodespotein” means to “rule the house”.
It comes from two words “oikos” - house and “despotes” - ruler.
Jesus uses it several times to refer to the “master of the house”
(e.g., Matt 10, 13, 20, 21, 24).

A widow, in Paul’s day, was the master of her house.
Even if she remarried, she remained master of her first household.
This same principle remained true as late as the 19th century,
when R. J. Breckinridge disclaimed any intent or desire
to interfere with his second wife’s estate.
With respect to their *common* estate, he claimed authority,
but with respect to the estate that she brought into the marriage,
he would only advise (and she didn’t always appreciate even that!).

Paul concludes by speaking to the rest of the women in the church:

¹⁶If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows.

Paul’s concern is that the resources of the church
should be focused on helping “those who are truly widows.”

Now, in Paul’s day, there were lots of widows in this situation.
Today, between pensions, social security, and other retirement programs
there are relatively few widows who are utterly destitute.

But that does not diminish the honor that we should give to widows.

If you have widows (or others in the family)
who are in need, then you should take care of them.
Our God is a God who takes care of widows and orphans.
If you belong to Jesus then the mystery of godliness must take root in you,
and you must care for the widows and orphans in your family!

Likewise, you should look for ways that you can serve and help the widows.
Do they have projects that need doing?