

## 1 Timothy 5:9-16, Should the church support widows, if so, why?

If you're familiar with 1 Timothy, you know that Paul mentions numerous problems taking place in the church at Ephesus. In light of this mess Paul writes this letter so that Timothy and the entire church will know how the church should run and how every individual—young, old, men, women—should behave, inside and outside the church, 3:15. God's children must be godly.

**Godliness**, this is why godliness is a big issue in 1 Timothy; it shows up multiple times in each chapter:

**1:3-5**, God wants children who are driven by love. Scripture tells us that God is love (1 John 4:8) and that all of us are made in His image (Genesis 1:27): believer and atheist or agnostic alike are all made in God's image; this means we have many things in common with Him. For example, we have the capacity to create, we have self-awareness, and we have the capacity to love and be loved. So yes, we must be driven by love at all times, but what does that mean, what does that look like? God doesn't mean love for love's sake. No, there must be something undergirding our love and 1:5 tells us what that is: "the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith." The ultimate purpose of God's commandments, His Word is to produce God's love in us but that love stands on something: a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith. God's Word will transform our minds (Romans 12:2) so that we'll see everything in life the way He does; everything we think, say, and do will be like God. We will have love, but it will be God's kind of love, which endures everything and is utterly selfless (1 Corinthians 13:4-8). So at the center of our godliness must be God's love and that love must be undergirded by a pure heart, good conscience, and sincere faith.

**2:8-10, 11-15**, men are supposed to use their hands to pray not fight; women are to care about their character more than their appearance and they're not to seek male authority.

**3:1-7**, the elders of the church must be blameless and Paul goes on to tell us what God means by this.

**3:8-13**, the deacons of the church must likewise be blameless and he tells us what God means by it.

**4:1-5, 6-11**, the false teachers are teaching Satan's lies instead of God's truth. And God tells Timothy just how important godliness is and where to get it: God's Truth, His Word. He also tells him repeatedly that he must teach them how to live God's Word, show them how to walk in it daily (4:6, 11, 16 cf. 5:7).

**4:12-16**, the letter is written to the church of Ephesus, but also to Timothy as a young pastor. And notice that the elders, the pastors of the church are to be the godly example that shows the entire flock what godliness is. And if Timothy gives himself entirely to God's Word, it will save him and the entire flock. However, this salvation is not from hell; it's from the difficulties of life here and now. Salvation from hell is not by works; it's by faith: 1:12-16—Paul was a wicked man, the worst, but the Lord showed him mercy, 1:13, and saved him, i.e., gave him eternal life through simple faith, 1:16. Timothy doesn't need eternal salvation; he already has this, 1:1-2—God is his Savior and Father and Jesus his Lord and hope. Then what does Timothy need saving from? From the difficult task that's in front of him at Ephesus: he's got to deal with older men and women, young men and women, and a host of difficult problems: self-appointed elders leading the people astray with bad, false, and erroneous doctrine. The men are fighting instead of praying. The women are having a fashion competition instead of caring about their character. Other women are seeking the authority God gave the males in the church. There's a need for qualified elders and deacons. Those teaching are guided by Satan's demonic doctrines, therefore, they're forbidding things God never forbade.

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**5:1-2**, every category of people in this church needs to be addressed: older and younger men and older and younger women.

**5:3-8**, there's also a problem regarding the widows: some who qualify aren't being supported. Some family members aren't stepping up to care for the widows in their families. Some widows who don't qualify are being supported. And all of this is having an impact on the church spiritually and financially.

**5:9-10**, Paul continues stating the qualifications concerning which widows should get support and which shouldn't: they must be 60 years or older, i.e., they've reached an age where they can't provide for themselves. They must be the "wife of one man," i.e., they remained sexually pure in their marriage (cf. Hebrews 13:4, same concept as 3:2 concerning potential elders). Paul doesn't mean here that a woman can't have more than one dead husband, after all, Paul tells younger widows that they can remarry, 5:14. Thus, a widow twice over would qualify if she met all other qualifications. The widow must've been faithful to her widow's ministry of good works in her family and the church: was a good mother, showed hospitality even to strangers, ministered to the saints' needs, helped the suffering, etc. And notice: her financial support from the church was not just based on her need (she has no family to support her, 5:5), but her character.

**5:11-12**, this, along with what God said already about what a widow does for the church, shows that these widows weren't just given money without any responsibility to the church. The church was going to provide for their basic needs and in return they were going to minister to the church, 5:5, 10. This became a problem for younger widows because they were still young enough to fall in love and marry. Thus, instead of fulfilling their responsibility to the church, they "cast off their first faith" bringing them condemnation. God doesn't want the church to put younger widows in this predicament.

**5:13**, another reason why the church shouldn't take in younger widows is since they'll have love and marriage on their minds, they won't be as faithful in fulfilling a widow's duties. Instead, they may wander about from house to house being idle, gossips and busybodies who say things they ought not. It's not good to give a young woman *or man* financial support without responsibility.

**5:14-15**, since younger widows aren't as well suited for widow ministry, God encourages them to remarry; otherwise they will give the "adversary" opportunity to speak evil of them, God and the church. In fact, some younger widows who were given financial support have already done what Paul warned against in 5:13 and thus fulfilled Satan's desire. Therefore, God encourages younger widows to marry, bear children, and manage their houses. What?! Is God a male chauvinist?<sup>1</sup> Never! God doesn't forbid a woman having a career outside the home, in fact, when God describes the ideal wife, she is a strong, independent business woman and yet she respects her husband implicitly (Proverbs 31:10-31). Getting married and having children is God's plan for both women *and men* unless He's given them the gift of celibacy (Genesis 1:28; 1 Corinthians 7:7-9). And they're both responsible to raise the children (Proverbs 1:8), but their roles will be different (the nourishing, nurturing, and tender role played by the mother in the early years cannot be fulfilled by the father).

**5:16**, why else must we do this? To unburden the church with our responsibility. Every male and female is responsible to care for the widows in their family. Timothy is to encourage all the members of the family, young and old, male and female, to pitch in and care for each other.

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<sup>1</sup> See more on this from the sermons that cover chapter 2:8-15, especially Is God a Male Chauvinist? Parts 1 and 2: <https://gcoforange.org/1%20Timothy/>.