

# Widows and Others In Need

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## Improper Treatment of Widows

Matthew 23:14 "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore, ye shall receive the greater damnation (KJV & YLT) but omitted in the ASV, ESV, Darby, IEB (International English Bible) and other translations].

Mar 12:38-40 "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour [exploit, strip one of his goods (Thayer)] widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation." Also Luke 20:46-7

Act 6:1 "In those days, as the number of the disciples was growing larger and larger, a complaint was made by the Hellenistic Jews against the Hebraic Jews that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food" (ISV). [There appeared to be a lack of respect for Hellenistic widows by Hebrew Christians.]

## Responsibility for their Family

1 Timothy 5:3-8 "Honor widows who are truly widows. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness [put their faith into practice (IEB)] to their own household [by caring for their own family (IEB)] and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God.

She who is truly a widow left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day, but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach. But if anyone does not provide for his relatives [own house (KJV)], and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever [infidel (KJV)]" (ESV).

- Give respect to widows but allow the children and grandchildren to grow by becoming servants
- The keywords are "honor" and "truly in need."

1 Timothy 5:16 "If 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" (ESV).

- 'If any believing women' appears to exclude believing men who have widowed relatives. However, all Christians, man or woman, (James 1:27) are expected to take care of them. Perhaps the man should provide resources, so as not to burden the church. The enrolled widows would perform the caring for function, thereby avoiding any impropriety of a male relative "caring for" widows in his family or extended family.

## Responsibility of Church

"This is how we have come to know love: the Messiah gave his life for us. We, too, ought to give our lives for our brothers" (1 John 3:16)

James 1:27 "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit [take care of (ISV)]; to look upon or after, to inspect, examine with the eyes Hebraistically, to look upon in order to help or to benefit,

(Thayer's Lexicon)] orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (ESV).

- James addressed Christians - the twelve tribes scattered abroad.
- The verb 'visit' as translated in most versions of the Bible means to "come to (a person) to comfort or benefit." The noun 'visit' means a "friendly or formal call upon someone" (Etymology Online).
- The only restriction placed upon the church, individually or as a body, was that widows must be in affliction (distress, straits, oppression, tribulation -Thayer Lexicon). 'Widows in their affliction' could be women married; only once, more than once, Christian, non-Christian or divorced and remarried.

1Timothy 5:5 "She who is truly a widow [widow indeed, and desolate (KJV); lacking resources, impoverished (Online Etymology Dictionary)], left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day, but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives" (ESV).

- Truly a widow
  - a. No family of any kind
  - b. Non-Christian family will not provide for her care - perhaps because she is a Christian
  - c. A capable widow who makes no attempt to provide for her needs does not appear to be destitute.
  - d. Christian families of a widow who can but does not take care of her needs are worse than infidels (unbelievers).

1 Timothy 5:9-10 "Let a widow be enrolled [taken into the number (KJV), registered (IEB)] if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband [faithful to husband (NIV, NLT, IEB)], and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality [KJV adds to strangers], has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work" (ESV).

- The church enrolls a widow to perform function(s) for the Christian family and provides for her needs.
  - a. Functions to be performed is not specified
  - b. Places for performing the function is identified
  - c. Needs may be met by giving food or money to purchase needs
- Widows are enrolled, taken into the number, registered
  - a. For some type of work; e.g., men enrolled in the army
  - b. Their work for the church was not done in some "church building" as there were none
  - c. The church was still to care for destitute widows not enrolled - see James 1:27 above
- Not less than sixty years of age
  - a. During the First Century women who reached the age of 60 would, on average, die between their 60th and 70th birthdays [revealedrome.com/2012/06/ancient-rome-daily-life-women-age.html#sthash.UTtBsy9R .dpuf].
  - b. The desire for sexual relations generally waned during the last few years of their life.
  - c. Destitute widows under 60 were still to be cared for by the church but not enrolled as they were expected to marry and not fulfill the task for which they were enrolled.

- • Wife of one husband
  - a. Only married once
  - b. Re-married following a divorce that terminated the marriage caused by sexual immorality (fornication) by her husband
  - c. Re-married following a divorce that terminated the marriage by adultery; i.e., breaking marriage covenant other than by fornication.
  - d. Re-married if marriage terminated by death of husband
  - e. Married to only one man at a time- not a polygamist
  
- Reputation for good works
  - a. Community knows and respects her because she helps others by her good works
  - b. Widows not being involved in serving and doing good works while married would not be expected to do so after becoming widowed.
  
- Brought up children
  - a. The experience of female parenting
  - b. This criteria could be met by parenting orphan children even if no biological child
  - c. Caring for children on an occasional basis does not carry the responsibility of child rearing
  
- Shown hospitality
  - a. To receive favorably, give ear to, embrace, make one's own, approve, not to reject, to take upon oneself, sustain, bear, and endure (Thayer Lexicon).
  - b. Appears to relate to individuals who are not friends or relative
  
- Washed the feet of the saints
  - a. Welcomed traveling Christians making them comfortable
  - b. To take on the role of a servant
  
- Cared for the afflicted
  - a. Oppressively afflict (Bible Hub)
  - b. Possibly beaten slave, parent of rebellious child of friend or relative, deserted wife or one persecuted because of faith, an orphan or unwanted child left to defend self.
  
- Devoted herself to every good work.
  - a. The widow's actions before becoming a widow clearly show she was God's servant
  - b. One should expect her servant activities would continue and that she would not become a busybody, idler, or gossip after her being taken into their number.

1 Timothy 5:11-15 "Refuse to enroll younger widows, for when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith [overcome their dedication to Christ (IEB); abandon task enrolled to perform]. 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. So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion

for slander. For some have already strayed after Satan. If 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" (ESV).

1 Corinthians 7:8-9 "To the unmarried [all who were once married and are now single (IEB)] and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (ESV).

- a. The desires for social and sexual relationships hinder widows from performing the task they agreed to when enrolled.
- b. Excessive time provides the opportunity to develop laziness and become idle, which often results in gossiping and minding everyone's business, a busybody.
- c. Because of strong sexual desires young widows should marry.

1 John 3:17-18 "Whoever has earthly possessions and notices a brother in need and yet withholds his compassion from him, how can the love of God be present in him? Little children, we must stop expressing love merely by our words and manner of speech; we must love also in action and in truth" (ISV).

- a. John addresses the Christian family both men and women.
- b. Brother in without any restrictions in need of necessities of life are to be assisted. Brother is often an inclusive term being either male or female.

Under the Old Covenant of law, the Samaritan Luke 10 in the parable known as the Good Samaritan knew who was unable to provide for his own needs and needed someone to help him. In the New Covenant of Grace more love for the destitute, especially widows, is expected.

## **Conclusion**

It is the responsibility of the widow's family, children, grandchildren, or near relatives to see to her if she is unable to care for themselves. Those without family or those whose family is unable or refuses to provide for their needs are to be taken care of by individual Christians and the church body. Christian destitute widows' needs are to be met before other widows.

Christians are to have compassion for those known to be lacking in the necessities of life: e.g., the Gentile Christians sent relief to Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem.

Destitute widows who have by their actions, prior to widowhood, had a reputation of doing good, and living pleasing to God, can be employed by the church. The Bible is silent regarding the purpose of enrolling. But my opinion is they performed functions needed by the Body. It could have been helping those suffering but not destitute, teaching non-Christian women the Gospel, teaching younger women how to treat their husbands and children with love and respect and to encourage them to do good works.