The Church and Widows
Scripture: 1 Timothy 5
Code: BQ7110

“Honor widows who are widows indeed.” (1 Timothy 5:3)

The English word *widow* describes a woman whose husband is dead. The Greek word *chera* (“widow”) includes that meaning, but is not limited to it. It is an adjective used as a noun, and means “bereft,” “robbed,” “having suffered loss,” or “left alone.” The word does not speak of how a woman was left alone, it merely describes the situation. It is broad enough to encompass those who lost their husbands through death, desertion, divorce, or imprisonment. It could even encompass those cases where a polygamist came to Christ and sent away his extra wives (William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975], 105).

The responsibility of the church thus extends to all qualifying women who have lost their husbands. With divorce and desertion rampant in our society, we face an even greater challenge than the Ephesian church.

The treatment of widows tests the spiritual character of the Christian community. Believers’ devotion to Christ can be seen in how they treat those without resources. Through the care it provides, the church manifests Christ’s love to the needy and gives witness of Christlike love to the watching world. Such care has been a part of the church’s life throughout its history. The welfare system of Western nations is a direct legacy of the church’s influence.

Honor is from *timao* and means “to show respect or care,” “to support,” or “to treat graciously.” It encompasses meeting needs, including financial ones (cf. Matt. 27:9, where it is used of pricing something; and 1 Tim. 5:17).

The church is not obligated to support all widows, only those who are **widows indeed.** Not all widows are truly alone and without means. Some have resources left them by their husbands or through their remaining family or friends. They do, however, need the spiritual comfort and care of the church. Financial support is to go to those completely alone and without necessary resources for daily life.

It is a sad commentary on our society that the number of bereft women in need of support is rising. The disintegration of the family not only creates more such women, but destroys the network of family support they depend on. The loss of that support will increase the burden on the church in the years ahead. That does not, however, alter the church’s responsibility. Churches will have to look honestly

and carefully at how much money they are spending on activities that have no biblical mandate. Such activities spend money that is then not available for widows.

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