

Paul's Instruction for Widows – Enrolled For Christ

1 Timothy 5:9-16

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⁹ Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband,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. ¹¹ But refuse to enroll younger widows, for when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry ¹² and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith. 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. 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. 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.

Have you ever desired to be known for a particular virtue, a godly quality or some heavenly characteristic? Would people in your circle of influence find some encouragement, some uplifting, some inspiration through you?

In this world that we live in, we see people pursuing all kinds of dreams, goals and ambitions. There are people known for certain skills, people who have a reputation for all kinds of specializations but how about having a reputation for serving others? How about being known for good works?

When we look at New Testament, it is not just some people who are called to do good works, every believer, every Christian is called to do good works.

Paul says in Ephesians that *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them”* Ephesians 2:10

Paul says we ought to be *“zealous for good works”* Titus 2:14

Paul wrote to Titus the following, *“The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.”* Titus 3:8

Jesus said, *“let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven”*. Matthew 5:16

The purpose of good works is to give glory to God not for self-glory.

In our passage under consideration this morning, Paul is instructing Timothy about enlisting widows to serve others.

To give a context, a few weeks ago, we looked at how widows are to be honored.

In 1 Timothy 5 verse 3, Paul tells Timothy to “*honor widows who are truly widows*”. When we looked at that passage, we said that the honoring of widows means supporting them financially. So today, in our passage, Paul instructs his disciple Timothy that widows who need to be supported by the church can be of great of service to others. And there is one overarching quality he tells Timothy to look for. Those who have a *reputation for good works*. And how does Paul describe those good works?

Let’s look at verses 9 through 10.

⁹ *Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband,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.*

What Paul means by the word *enrolled* is to have the widows be placed on a list or a roster to receive support from the church. And the *two* qualifications Paul proposes are age and marriage. The potential widow to receive support is to be at least sixty years. Why sixty? Culturally, in Paul’s time sixty was thought to be the age of retirement. It was also the age when remarriage was unlikely and the widow would perhaps remain single. And the widow, before her husband had passed, should have been faithful to the husband. Paul desires that through the good reputation of the widow, the reputation of the church. And then you see the five-fold ways the widow must known for good works.

- *Raising children.*
 - Raising children can be tedious and challenging but it is a good work. Children are a gift from God and parents have stewardship in raising children.
- *has shown hospitality,*
 - This literally means receiving strangers who are in need
- *has washed the feet of the saints*
 - We see the example of Jesus himself who served his disciples by washing their feet. This could also mean caring for the needs of believers
- *has cared for the afflicted*
 - The widow is devoted to caring for those who are in distress and go through suffering
- *and has devoted herself to every good work.*

- This is not a finite list. The widow is a lady who is fully given to good works. That is all she does. This sounds like one busy lady. Someone who loves Jesus and lives for Jesus and wants to show Jesus to others.

We are told in the book of Acts that Tabitha was one such lady.

“Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity.” Acts 9:36

What a wonderful gift it is to the church to have such women. And I thank God for the women in our church who have done good works and continue to do good works. God sees the love you have for others.

So, Paul wants widows to be supported by the church. And those who have already served and have a heart of service are the ones that must be supported. Now, to contrast with widows who are younger than sixty, Paul has some very wise advice and instruction.

Let's look at verses 11 through 15.

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

The first reason that Paul gives for not enrolling younger women is that they may have conflicting desires. They are free to re-marry if they wanted to. But if they are enrolled to be receive support and then later abandon their service, it is going to serve no one. The church suffers in its reputation and the widows may be blamed for having their desire to serve. So, Paul is careful to not quickly let younger widow into serving and receiving support. In verse 13, Paul has one more reason as to why younger widows shouldn't be enrolled quickly. Some of them were becoming very busy not the right kind of busy but they were becoming busybodies. The older widows were busy for all the right reasons but their singular devotion was to serve others.

Paul also may have another area he wants to correct in the church. The false teachers in Ephesus were promoting asceticism. Paul wrote in the previous chapter that some *“some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, ² through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, ³ who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods”*. So Paul recommends in verse 14 that younger widows marry and have families. That way they will either serve God by serving others or remarry and stay out of sin. This is a brilliant strategy.

Paul summarizes his instruction to Timothy in verse 16.

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.

Paul instructs the families of widows to care for them. He wants this so the church would not be burdened. Truly there were many many needs in this world. There are many needs that come to my attention. Not all can be met. Paul offers much wisdom how we can care for those who in need.

Paul wrote to Titus that good works are excellent and profitable for people.

However, good works don't earn you salvation. Good works won't give you a ticket to heaven. Good works are evidence of God's good work in you. *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast."*

Ephesians 2:8-9

God wants you to do good works because the *greatest good* has been done in you, namely, the gift of salvation. God wants you to do good works because your *greatest need* has been met in Jesus Christ. Your greatest need is the forgiveness of your sin. When you put your faith in the Jesus Christ, you received the gift of eternal life. The gift of righteousness. And if you have never received this gift of God, this is a marvelous gift you can receive by turning from sin and trusting in the death of Jesus Christ as payment for your sin.

I began my message with the question, "Have you ever desired to be known for a particular virtue?" Yesterday, I was reminded about Elizabeth Elliot. Elizabeth was the wife of Jim Elliot who is famously known for his missionary journey to Ecuador. When Jim and four friends arrived in Ecuador to bring the Gospel to the Auca Indians, all five of these men were speared and killed. And Elizabeth was left alone with her ten-month old daughter. She could have retreated and come back to the U.S and settled back at home. But she did not. She and her friends reached out to the Auca Indians and that community was reached and transformed for Jesus Christ. Today, Elizabeth Elliot is known for her selfless love for a people group not like hers. There is book called Through the Gates of Splendor if you want to know more about the Elliot family. Ms Elliot is known to one of the most influential women in missions. *"let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works"* Hebrews 10:24

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: Serve The Needy. 1 Timothy 5:9-16

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. What are some Biblical reasons for devoting ourselves to good works/serve the needy?

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. What does the Bible say about our greatest need and how is that need met? Matthew 26:28, Luke 24:47, Acts 10:43, 13:36-38, Ephesians 1:7
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

4. For personal reflection: In what way do you see yourself pursuing good works? Raising children, showing hospitality, caring for the afflicted, attending to the needs of fellow believers etc