

Family Business Part 2: *Taking Care of our Own* 1 Timothy 5:3-8

Introduction:

In 1969, Governor Ronald Reagan of California made what he later admitted was one of the biggest mistakes of his political life. Seeking to eliminate the strife and deception often associated with the legal regime of fault-based divorce, Reagan signed the nation's first no-fault divorce bill. The new law eliminated the need for couples to fabricate spousal wrongdoing in pursuit of a divorce; indeed, one likely reason for Reagan's decision to sign the bill was that his first wife, Jane Wyman, had unfairly accused him of "mental cruelty" to obtain a divorce in 1948. But no-fault divorce also gutted marriage of its legal power to bind husband and wife, allowing one spouse to dissolve a marriage for any reason — or for no reason at all.

In the decade and a half that followed, virtually every state in the Union followed California's lead and enacted a no-fault divorce law of its own. This legal transformation was only one of the more visible signs of the divorce revolution then sweeping the United States: From 1960 to 1980, the divorce rate more than doubled — from 9.2 divorces per 1,000 married women to 22.6 divorces per 1,000 married women. This meant that while less than 20% of couples who married in 1950 ended up divorced, about 50% of couples who married in 1970 did. And approximately half of the children born to married parents in the 1970s saw their parents part, compared to only about 11% of those born in the 1950s.¹

The author went on to say there were several, far reaching causes and results of this shift in divorce:

- The anti-institutional tenor of the age also meant churches lost much of their moral authority to reinforce the marital vow, with several denominations giving support to the divorce revolution
- The 60's and 70's shifted from looking at marriage and family through the prisms of duty, obligation, and sacrifice, where success, happiness, and intimacy were good, but not the only view, to a focus on individual fulfillment and personal growth. The measure of success, then was a self-orientated ethic of romance, intimacy, and fulfillment, where ones primary obligation was not to one's family but ones self. The 70's marked a shift from 'traditional' marriage to a 'soul mate' model of marriage.
- Though divorce rates have steadied, marriage rates have steadily fallen and cohabitation rates have exploded, up 14 fold from 1960 to 2007, from 439,000 to 6.4 million (which have only gone up in the last 13 years)

What does all of this have to do with our study of 1 Timothy or our church? Everything. There is an attack on God's design of marriage, and this has lead to the breakdown of homes, affects our children, and negatively affects our broader culture. This is not only where the **church speaks to these things**, but also becomes a **beacon of light**, a city on a hill that demonstrates to the world the realities of a reconciled relationship to God through Christ but also an opportunity to play out a restored reality of marriage and family. As we come to a new section concerning the church family, we have a few observations and considerations before digging into the text

Some preliminary considerations:

¹ W. Bradford Wilcox, "The Evolution of Divorce." <https://www.nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/the-evolution-of-divorce>, National Affairs, Spring 2020.

1. **The word "widow"** – It is the word "chera" (Xnpa), which primarily means widow, one who was married but whose husband died. But in a broader sense also means one "bereft, forsaken, or a woman living without a husband". In other words, it means a woman who was married but who no longer has a husband through death, desertion, or divorce. This is important to determine **who** the passage is talking about and **what** we are called to do. Our current culture has far too many divorced or abandoned women, even in the church, and we must know what we are called to do to help and care.
2. **God has a special concern for widows** – All through the Bible, God calls for justice for 3 specific categories of those who were in need of care: **the sojourner** or stranger in the land, **the fatherless, and the widow**. These would not have the ability to work as easily or fend for themselves, so special care was needed. Here is a survey of God's view of widows:

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. ¹⁸ He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. ¹⁹ Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. ²⁰ You shall fear the LORD your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear.

Deuteronomy 10:17-20

Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides through the deserts; his name is the Lord; exult before him! Father **of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.**

Psalm 68:4-5

The LORD watches over the sojourners; **he upholds the widow and the fatherless**, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin

Psalm 146:9

In the New Testament, we see Jesus having compassion on the **widow at Nain** when he raised her son from the dead, since she had lost a husband and son and thus all those who would care for her (Luke 7:11-14). Jesus lauded the poor widow for giving her 2 mites to the shame of those who gave to be seen in the Temple (Luke 21:1-3; Mark 12:41-44). We see in the epistles that caring for widows and orphans is the true definition of pure religion (James 1:27)

3. **The gospel calls and compels us to good works** – We are saved from our utter and total depravity by faith, given to us by the grace of God (Eph. 2:8,9), through the work of Jesus on the cross, who takes all of our sin on Himself, offers us forgiveness, repentance of our sin, and the gift of His righteousness in us. But we must remember that though works do not save, they are an absolute **result of salvation**: *"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we **should walk in them.**"* (Eph. 2:10). This means that the call of the gospel in the church is to give justice and care to those who cannot care for themselves. In this case, widows come into view.

The Church is Responsible to Honor Widows (5:3, 16)

"Honor widows who are truly widows...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."

Jewish Care for widows in Israel – The Jewish community in the first century seemed to take the OT commands to care for widows seriously (Deut. 14:28-29; 24:17-19; 26:12-13; 27:19; Isa. 1:17). On Fridays there would be an offering taken up and distributed before Shabbat started in the evening. However, there was also clear violation of what needed to be done among the Pharisees, and Jesus called them out for it. **Exodus 20:12** and **21:17** clearly stated to honor father and mother, and reviling them would result in death (yikes). Part of honor was caring for them financially, yet the Pharisees **got around** this financial care by creating a tradition of the Law, which said if you dedicated some of your money or income to the Lord, it was **Corban**, and since it was the Lord's they believed they did NOT have to help parents (Mark, 7:8-13). This is like hiding income on your tax forms and saying "I don't actually make much money" so you qualify for more aid.

Church's care for widows – It is also clear that when the initial wave of Jews converted to following Jesus, the church adopted the need to care for widows. **Act 6:1-7** tells of both care and complexity of caring for the needs of numerous widows from all backgrounds. The church became a lifeline to widows, and honoring had to do with both **financial and spiritual care**, in some ways becoming the husbandly voice for those whose husbands have left.

Two principles:

1. Financial support is clear since verse 16 says it can be overwhelmed or burdened if there were too many who needed help.
2. The first **program** of the church was caring for widows! How we care for our own is the foundation by which we have a voice in the culture. We always speak the truth of God's Word, but that becomes real and powerful when it is backed up by action IN the church.

The Church is Responsible to Identify Widows (5:4-7)

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. ⁵She who is truly a widow, **left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues** in supplications and prayers night and day, ⁶but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. ⁷Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach

It is clear, then, that there were qualifications for which widows would be supported. There were **3 classifications of a widow indeed:**

- **She had NO FAMILY MEANS OF SUPPORT (4)** – If a woman is left truly alone like the woman at Nain, she would qualify for help from the church. The first line of defense in any kind of need is always the family, in financial, physical, emotional, or spiritual support. This is God's plan and design and which the church builds on. This is why the growth of a **divorce culture** is so devastating. It leaves finances split and those who need protection uncovered. Just in the last few weeks a friend has been trying to care for his sick mother, but since she is divorced, she does not have many assets to her name and even those she DID have were swindled away in a scam. What would have been avoided by a husband is lost. The church steps in and fills that void when there are no means of family support
- **She is left alone with no opportunity to remarry (5)** – It is clear that one of the main options for a widowed or divorced woman is to remarry. Now, the Bible is clear that if a woman was divorced on Biblical grounds (her husband abandoned her or joined himself in adultery to

another with no opportunity for reconciliation) she is free to remarry. Paul says it later, *"I would have the younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households."* But for whatever reason if a widow is currently unable to remarry she would be covered under the protective care of the church.

- **She is a mature believer** – Notice that the widow the church cares for is a **believer**. If a widowed woman is acting according to her passions or self-indulgence, not only is she not covered by the church, she may not even be a believer. But a **true widow** who has demonstrated faithfulness is hope and prayer. She is committed to Christ and His church, not someone who is simply looking for a handout. This also means that the church WILL reach out beyond her walls and people to care for those in the community and around the world, but her **PRIMARY call is to care for those that are a part of HER HOUSE!** If we invest in many good things and people OUTSIDE OF OUR CHURCH, but NEGLECT THOSE WITHIN, we are missing the point.

Key Principle: Caring for people, or giving justice to those in need, is never simple but complex. It takes a great amount of compassion, sacrifice, thought, discernment, and planning to execute. I think it's fascinating that Paul spent the good part of a chapter, out of 6 total, talking to the church about widows. Why? Organizing and caring for individuals is difficult, and clearly these difficulties had already shown their head in the church at Ephesus.

The Church is Responsible when the Family Fails to Care for Widows (5:8)

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

The church reflects the family, and the family reflects the church. We will keep repeating that as often as we see it in Scripture until it takes root in our heart and mind. I want to take you back to **verse 4** which states positively what verse 8 states negatively. Apparently there were individuals and families who were failing to care for their relatives, leaving the burden of responsibility on the church.

- **Provision in the family** – We live in a culture where many households are dual income, where both husband and wife work outside the home, which then divides the work inside the home between them. Some have made the decision for a husband to work and a wife to care for her **household**, meaning she literally manages the family affairs, children, and dwelling. However your family has divided these up, one thing is clear: **it takes hard work and commitment to get this done. Marriage and family basically is a call to die!** Die to self, sacrifice for others, and express the highest of virtues which is love! Here are two huge principles about caring for family that we find here:
 1. **True godliness is shown (and proven) by caring for immediate family and relatives** – One of the things I've been impressed with in our church is the amount of families here that have taken in and taken care of parents in need at the last stage of life. In our shepherding group, we have families that have taken care of a parent for over **9 years** in their home, and another that is in the midst of over **3 years**. Godliness is a radical transformation of our inner self through the work of Jesus Christ, so this hard work can be done with joy knowing that "it is pleasing in the sight of God" and that He gives the power to do it. I would say it this way: no amount of godliness shown OUTSIDE of the home will be validated without FIRST proving it in the home,

and not just in raising kids but in helping those in need of care. The job of a parent is never really done, is it, and godliness is willing to be a living sacrifice.

2. **Failure to care for family in need is incompatible with faith and does not even raise to the level of unbelievers!** - In other words, even UNBELIEVERS understand the responsibility of caring for family members. God expects that to happen since that is how He created the family structure, and when unbelievers enter into that covenant, even in unbelief, they resonate with the expectations. So a **professed believer who fails to provide for those within his own family**, he fails on multiple levels, leaving the burden to the State, church, or others to take care of what is rightfully his to take care of.

Why does this matter? Not only does this matter in terms of actual care and justice for those in need, it absolutely matters as a **test of true godliness and the witness of the church to the world**. For families, do we believe that God is enough and that obedience is ultimate, willingly sacrificing comfort, time, resources, etc. for the sake of loving others? For the church, do we have a legitimate witness to world if we have those in our midst who are not being cared for? Are we willing to sacrifice, be uncomfortable, and trust the Lord with that kind of care?

How do things change? We've asked that question this last week especially. How do we begin to change in our culture and show the gospel that produces good works? The author of the beginning article answered that by calling for the government to change divorce law, add marriage incentives, and improving the tax code. That makes sense when you see the problem only as a governmental, policy, or law issue. But we account change differently. We see change **one person, one disciple, one family at a time**. We begin to effect change by acting justly toward widows, walking kindly toward our relatives and caring for them, and walking humbly before God to sacrifice our desires, hobbies, and comforts to truly obey Him. That is how **godliness works**, changing us from the inside out, families out, churches out.

Questions to Answer:

- Read Ephesians 2:1-10 – Good works are a necessary RESULT of salvation. Where have you been engaged in good works? What are areas of obedient action that you can grow in and engage in?
- Our church will be as strong as the family units that make it up. What are areas in your home, in terms of godliness, that needs to be strengthened? What areas have been neglected?
- What are ways we as individuals and as a corporate body better care for the true widows in our church?

Ways to Pray:

- Pray that God would grant faith and repentance to many during this time when people are seeking solutions to their pain and fear.
- Pray for the strengthening of our families and committed care for all in our church.
- Pray for our church as a whole to be **engaged** in loving discussion with others, thoughtful listening, and seeking to give truthful answers. Pray we'd have and take the opportunities God presents to share the hope we have in Christ.