

## 1 TIMOTHY 5:11-16

### WHAT ABOUT THE YOUNGER WIDOWS?

“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. 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.”<sup>1</sup>

**W**hat business has any preacher addressing issues concerning women? I’ll raise the question before someone else raises it. The question is tantamount to complaining that an elder should not address any issue with which he does not have personal experience. I am well used to such complaints, having been on the receiving end of similar criticisms for many years. Long ago, I learned that if the preacher wanted no criticism, he should say nothing, do nothing, be nothing. There are always critics prepared to tell the man of God what he should do or what he should not do. Frankly, there is but one appraisal that matters to me, and that is whether He who appointed me to this service shall at last commend me, saying, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Almost a century ago, an American President in a speech delivered at the Sorbonne, said, “It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.”<sup>2</sup> My aim is to honour God through ensuring that I do not shrink from declaring to you “the whole counsel of God” [Acts 20:27].

Should such a criterion expressing timidity in the pulpit be applied, no pastor would ever speak of a specific sin unless he has participated in and, hopefully, been delivered from said sin. Again, applying the artificial standard that seems to be bandied about so casually, no pastor should speak of any particular theological error if he has not personally perpetuated the particular error. Of course, holding such a position would insure that neither sin nor theological error would ever be addressed. Such an aberrant position would ensure that the people of God would be spiritually anemic and woefully ignorant of the will of God. Failure to speak the whole truth of God would dishonour Him Who gave us this Holy Word.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>2</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, “Citizenship In a Republic,” speech delivered at the Sorbonne, Paris, France, 23 April, 1910, <http://www.theodore-roosevelt.com/trsorbonespeech.html>, accessed 13 March 2014

I am fully aware that there exists marked hypersensitivity about virtually all cultural issues in this day—all participants, real and imagined, tend to become dramatically polarised. Race should never enter into consideration when discussing issues that affect the churches of our Lord—but it does. It amuses me that at a time when western culture has made such great strides in race relations, race is a greater issue than ever before. Similarly, at a time when women have greater visibility than ever before in every facet of society and when women have made such great advancements in the world, there is greater sensitivity to gender issues than ever before.

So, the question remains, what gives an elder the “right” to speak on any women’s issue? The simple answer is that the issue is specifically addressed in the Word of God. Thus, it falls under the purview of the elders’ charge to preach the whole counsel of God. Speaking more broadly, women need to be saved the same as men must be saved. Women who have been redeemed by the grace of God must be instructed in righteousness and in what pleases the Lord. We appear to have forgotten that we enter Heaven as singles—sex is no consideration in the Kingdom of God. Therefore, in the congregation of the Faithful, there are no “women’s issues” or “men’s issues,” per se. Ultimately, all issues are resolved through reference to that which “adorn(s) the doctrine of God our Saviour.” Ultimately, each Christian is to seek that which honours the Master and which builds unity for the Faith.

**THE PROSCRIPTION** — “Refuse to enroll younger widows.” The context of the Apostle’s proscription is his presentation of criteria for appointment to an “order of widows,” as discussed in an earlier message.<sup>3</sup> The concept of an “order of widows” was enlistment of godly widows who would commit themselves to prayer and fasting on behalf of the congregation. This action would extend the work of the congregation in dramatic fashion. If we believe that prayer truly changes things, and if we believe that God delights to answer the prayers of His people, then it should follow that enlisting reliable individuals to specifically pray for the ministry of the church and especially to pray for the elders would benefit the people of God.

You will recall that the criteria for appointment to the “order of widows,” were that a woman must truly be a widow sixty years of age or older, known to have been a “one man woman” and enjoying a reputation for good works. In short, anyone appointed to this service had to be an older woman who exemplified a godly life—she would be required to be an example of a godly woman.

Whatever might be said concerning Paul’s seemingly harsh assessment of younger widows must be understood in light of the immediate context of his letter. He is specifically addressing the possibility of enrolling younger widows in the order of widows. It appears apparent that this may have already been done with disappointing results. If this was the case, and it does appear to be accurate, these younger women were being enrolled more as a ministry of charity rather than seizing the opportunity to enlist them in the labours of the congregation.

Consider the context in which this letter was written. In some respects, the context mirrors the social and cultural conditions into which churches are entering today. Contemporary society was not positively disposed toward the Faith; Christians were seen as odd at best and as threatening to the delicate social balance at worst. Thus, the Apostle seeks to encourage the believers to live a life that distinguishes them from the remainder of society even as he endeavours to keep them from becoming deliberately provocative.

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Stark, “The Widows’ Might,” 9 March 2014, <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/clientimages/42652/sermonarchive/1%20timothy%205.9-16%20the%20widows%27%20might.pdf>

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Paul was clearly aware of the opinion of contemporary society, and he sought to avoid giving offence deliberately. This undoubtedly accounts for Paul's demand that the overseer "must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil" [1 TIMOTHY 3:7]. Likewise, his advice to young widows in our text would fall into this category. Consider his concerns expressed in other places—advice to young wives [TITUS 3:7], to young men [TITUS 2:8] and to bondservants [1 TIMOTHY 6:1; TITUS 2:10]. The behaviour of the members of the assembly would bear on the reputation of the church, and thus bear on Christ.

Especially when the culture is opposed to Christian values, the people of God must be aware of attitudes. Christians must avoid being deliberately provocative, and yet avoid compromise on doctrine. The task is demanding, but we are called to honour God in this matter. We are given guidance in Paul's cautionary warning to the Christians in Corinth. "Though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings" [1 CORINTHIANS 9:19-23].

Christians must be careful not to stretch these verses beyond reason, but we must not compromise the Faith, even as we seek to avoid giving offence to any. In another portion of that same letter, the Apostle spoke of his effort to avoid giving offence. "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved" [1 CORINTHIANS 10:31-33].

The point is sufficiently important to the ministry of any congregation and to any saint that it bears repetition, and the Apostle does so in his Second Letter to the Corinthian Church. "We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything" [2 CORINTHIANS 6:3-10].

The congregation in Ephesus was threatened by a serious heresy. A group threatened the spiritual health, and hence the righteous vitality, of the people of God. The nature of the group that is attacking was exposed in Paul's Letters to Timothy and Titus as immoral. We learn that the group was an ascetic [see 1 TIMOTHY 4:3], Gnosticising [see 1 TIMOTHY 6:20] movement that challenged the church. This particular group appears to have enjoyed particular success among women. Paul exposed them when he wrote, "Among [the heretics] are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth" [2 TIMOTHY 3:6,7]. I suggest that these verses should be seen, not so much as an attempt to snatch back women who had become enmeshed in this cultic movement so much as Paul was endeavouring to strengthen the women of the congregation against the heretics' ascetic message.

There is no question but when viewed in isolation, Paul's statement concerning younger widows is offensive in modern culture. However, context is everything. We imagine that we live in an environment that permits us to emphasise personal "rights" without consideration of personal responsibilities to the assembly or to any other entity. This novel view of rights prevailing over responsibility has so infected our modern culture that we insist on teaching from youngest ages that each individual is special. Thus, the sense of personal entitlement is defining for contemporary culture.

I'm not drifting off course too far when I mention the case of a young woman in New Jersey who sued her parents. Rachel Canning sued her parents to compel them to pay her tuition and to cover her living costs. She moved out of her family home because she did not want to abide by her parents' rules, primarily complaining about an imposed curfew and required chores. She feels entitled to live without parental oversight.<sup>4</sup> She exemplifies the sense of entitlement felt by many people in this day. Thus, young women, and young widows as defined in our text, feel entitled to all the church has to offer. However, the Apostle brings that thought crashing down with his sobering assessment of reality.

What, specifically, did the Apostle say? To be certain, widows younger than sixty years of age are not to be enrolled in the recognised ministry of prayer and fasting. He is not excluding anyone from prayer and fasting; he is, however, stating that if the church is to be responsible for providing a stipend, then only those that meet the stated qualification may be enrolled. He emphasises his proscription by justifying the command through appeal to what will happen in many instances if the injunction is ignored.

He follows up with the preferable alternative for those that are designated "younger widows." He would have them marry, bear children (if possible), manage their households and above all else, "give the adversary no occasion for slander" [1 TIMOTHY 5:14]. This is but a pointed statement applying what has been stated previously. The Apostle is seeking to address what had already become a scandal—people who named the Name of Christ and yet lived as though righteousness was unimportant. Paul was scandalised, and the church should have been scandalised, by those who professed to follow the Christ and yet lived as the world lived.

**THE PRINCIPLE** — "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. 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."

Recall that the early Christians were Jewish. Consequently, they adopted many practises from their Jewish heritage. Widows were regarded as the object of special solicitude. This is borne out in numerous instructions provided in the Old Testament. Here are a few verses that focus on the need to care for the vulnerable, especially widows. First, I note God's character. "[God] executes justice for the fatherless and the widow" [DEUTERONOMY 10:18a]. If orphans and widows are the focus of God's special protection, then those who would follow Him would obviously be expected to reflect this same character. Thus, observant Jews were especially careful to provide for the widows.

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<sup>4</sup> Enjoli Francis, Ryan Smith and Aaron Katersky, "Rachel Canning Loses Effort to Make Parents Pay High School Tuition," <http://abcnews.go.com/US/rachel-canning-loses-suit-make-parents-pay-high/story?id=22768908>, accessed 15 March 2014; Peggy Wright, "Morris Catholic senior sues her parents," <http://www.dailyrecord.com/article/20140302/NJNEWS/303020017/Morris-Catholic-senior-sues-her-parents>, accessed 15 March 2014

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The thought that God was a protector of the vulnerable became codified in the Law. Moses wrote in this same Book of Deuteronomy, “You shall not pervert the justice due to the sojourner or to the fatherless, or take a widow’s garment in pledge” [DEUTERONOMY 24:17]. Though cause might dictate that one lending to a widow required collateral, the Law specified that one could not take her garment; she was to enjoy protection from undue hardship.

In the Psalms, we read of the character of God:

“Father of the fatherless and protector of widows  
is God in his holy habitation.”

[PSALM 68:5]

David was exhibiting the divine character when this Psalm was written. It is significant that God chose to present Himself in this light; we dare not ignore this revelation of the Holy One.

When God rebuked Israel through Isaiah, He gave this antidote for their wickedness:

“Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;  
remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes;  
cease to do evil,  
learn to do good;  
seek justice,  
correct oppression;  
bring justice to the fatherless,  
plead the widow’s cause.”

[ISAIAH 1:16-17]

Those who would be holy must indeed focus on personal responsibility before God; but how they interact with the vulnerable reveals the reality of personal transformation.

Clearly, the earliest Followers of the Way understood this responsibility and adopted it for the churches. They provided for the widows in the Jerusalem congregation [see ACTS 6:1]. As the Faith spread, this concern for widows continued [see ACTS 9:39 ff.]. And this concern continued as is evident in this Letter to Timothy. The congregation in Ephesus was caring for widows within the assembly. However, Paul is endeavouring to transition the congregation from the view that widows are to be objects of benevolence to the thought that some should be accepted as valuable servants within the congregation. However, he is acting realistically in recognising that the church cannot possibly afford full support for all who are vulnerable and in endeavouring to establish those who can bless the congregation through a special ministry of prayer and fasting.

I need to invest some time exploring why Paul would proscribe enrolling younger widows; we need to understand what he was thinking so we don’t fall into the trap of imagining that the Apostle hated women and simply tried to ignore their needs. As appears to have been true throughout the churches of that day, the congregation in Ephesus accepted responsibility to provide for those who were in need, just as it must do even to this day.

Families were to care for their own members. Those widows who had older children or grandchildren would be cared for by those whom they had raised. If there were other family members, it was expected that they would accept responsibility for their own. In fact, refusal to care for one’s own family members was tantamount to a denial of the Faith [see 1 TIMOTHY 5:8].

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Additionally, part of managing their own household meant believing women accepted responsibility to care for widows who were part of the family [1 TIMOTHY 5:16]. It is interesting to note that women managed the household; and the household could be quite large, including not only the immediate family of husband, wife and children, but widows and grandparents as well. Even orphaned relatives might find themselves in the household. This is the basis for the rather stern command in this sixteenth verse.

Therefore, we can be certain that Paul is not simply trying to ignore the immediate need. Rather, he appears to be endeavouring to confront the congregation to accept responsibility for their own families. More germane to the message, he proscribes enrolling younger widows into the order of widows because they would be hard pressed to maintain the necessary pledge. Those who were enrolled into the order of widows appear to have taken a pledge to commit themselves to prayer and fasting. Part of this pledge appears to have been that they would not remarry. This would have been difficult for a younger widow to maintain.

It is natural to want companionship. It is natural, especially for younger women, to want to be married. This statement does not focus solely on a desire for sexual activity, as might be emphasised in modern culture. This is rather acknowledgement that we are created to want to share our lives. We long to give joy to others and to enjoy companionship. Clearly, the Apostle was not opposed to remarriage. In the First Letter to Corinthian Christians, the Apostle wrote, “To the unmarried 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” [1 CORINTHIANS 7:8, 9]. Therefore, we can be assured that he was not attempting to impose a pledge of chastity on anyone. He was, however, facing reality.

When he states of younger widows that “their passions draw them away from Christ,” he uses the temporal particle to indicate that the timing is general. “The subjunctive mood signals that the reality of the situation depends upon external circumstances (i.e., the right man, the right moment, the right mood). When a certain combination of events comes together, such widows may be overcome from their desires.”<sup>5</sup>

To understand Paul’s point, we need to bring in some of the background that we have already studied. We saw that there were false teachers “desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they [were] saying or the things about which they [were making] confident assertions” [1 TIMOTHY 1:7]. Moreover, these false teachers were forbidding marriage and requiring abstinence [1 TIMOTHY 4:3]. Later, Paul would state that these false teachers were preying on vulnerable women [2 TIMOTHY 3:6].

Therefore, the heresy that threatened the congregation focused on vulnerable women. Focus on the vulnerability of these women rather than their sex; they were susceptible because of their fear and an insecure future. The heresy Paul was addressing does not appear to have been so much a well-formulated doctrinal error as it was a collection of loosely associated ideas. Regardless of how the heresy was described, the impact was the same—destruction of righteousness and godliness. In a similar manner, the failure to have a defined doctrine is often true of many heresies that threaten the faithful in this day. Moreover, heresy often appeals to vulnerable individuals because the error is confidently presented by powerful personalities and because it appears to offer security of a legalistic teaching. However, the supposed security must always prove false, leading to disaster. In the case of the Ephesian heresy, widows who bought into the error were quickly in conflict with their own desires and the practise of the leaders they were following who preached against their natural desires.

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<sup>5</sup> John A Kitchen, **The Pastoral Epistles for Pastors** (Kress Christian Publications, The Woodlands, TX 2009) 213-4

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If the widow had taken a pledge to remain unmarried, her desire for marriage would put her in an impossible position. Thus, she would believe that she was condemned because she had “abandoned her former faith.” Her vulnerability in this instance would expose her to attack by the wicked one. The condemnation she would experience—self-condemnation or possibly condemnation from the false teachers for failure to live up to her pledge, is the same word which speaks of vulnerability when one is appointed too quickly as an elder [see **1 TIMOTHY 3:6**].

A serious truth that is often ignored or downplayed among the churches is that it is possible for a Christian to stray after Satan. When the Apostle writes, “Some have already strayed after Satan” [**1 TIMOTHY 5:15**], he is not saying that such individuals are now condemned and unsaved; he is, however, saying that they have strayed off the path of Christ and they are now walking along a path mapped out by the evil one. If the one straying is not a believer, nothing of significance will happen to them. However, if they belong to Christ, they will be disciplined. The practical impact for the congregation is that this individual will be injured and possibly lost to productive service for Christ.

Here is the picture, then. A younger widow may make a pledge to commit herself to remain unmarried, whether under pressure from false teaching or whether out of purer, though misguided, motives. However, when her longing for companionship begins to press on her, she will be conflicted. In this conflicted state she becomes even more vulnerable, and her vulnerability exposes her to attack by the wicked one. The conflict is not unlike that experienced today by women who take a vow of chastity in a desire to serve Christ or men who take a vow of chastity in order to enter into some ecclesiastical order. Such a vow is unnatural and exposes both to terrible assaults from the evil one. Thus, they would justify breaking their previous vow as nothing. In this situation, jettisoning her vow and under attack from the wicked one, she may well declare that she would no longer follow Christ. Of course, such a declaration can only lead to disaster—either she will be exposed for a fraudulent profession earlier, or she will experience heartache and sorrow as she is disciplined for her perfidy.

Paul gives a second reason for his refusal to appoint younger widows to an order of widows. He speaks of their lack of maturity. Struggling with their God-given desire for a family, their desire for companionship, their desire to fulfil the role of a wife, these younger widows will face a series of temptations. These temptations are listed in the thirteenth verse. “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” [**1 TIMOTHY 5:13**]. Because of the newfound freedom from providing for themselves, they would be susceptible to idleness. The last thing the Apostle wanted was for the church to subsidise leisure to become nuisances.

“Idle hands are the devil’s workshop” is an old saw that was often quoted to me as when I was a child. There is more than a modicum of truth in those words. Should the widows become idlers, they would be guilty of gossip and of acting as busybodies. What is worse, they would fall into the trap of “saying what they should not.” People who visit in many homes will hear things that should not be repeated. Elders and deacons must be extremely careful to avoid repeating things they hear. These widows would be challenged to repeat the things they heard.

Gossip is a grave danger; this accounts for several cautionary statements found in the Proverbs.

“Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets,  
but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered.”

[**PROVERBS 11:13**]

“A dishonest man spreads strife,  
and a whisperer separates close friends.”

[PROVERBS 16:28]

“Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets;  
therefore do not associate with a simple babbler.”

[PROVERBS 20:19]

“For lack of wood the fire goes out,  
and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases.”

[PROVERBS 26:20]

The deck was stacked against these women; Paul sought to avoid putting them in a position where they would be tempted to become idle, just as he endeavours to protect the church from the consequences of such a situation. Raising children is hard work; it demands the best of anyone. A widow that is also endeavouring to provide for herself and a family will be compelled to work harder than perhaps any other individual in society. I want to encourage all who are in such a position. Hard work is not only productive, it is protective.

If the church provided all the needs of able-bodied women, they would learn to be idlers. A curse of the modern welfare state is that it destroys initiative and productivity. One who can make more by staying home than by working will not want to work. Individuals with energy and time need to focus on using these precious commodities properly. The widows in the congregation would not be helped by being put on the list of widows.

An underlying issue that is not often considered when addressing this passage is that there appears to have been a large number of widows in the church in Ephesus. This larger number does not necessarily mean that there were a lot of men dying. The word that is translated widow throughout this letter was a broader word than we might suppose. The word simply meant “a woman living without a husband (and not necessarily previously married).”<sup>6</sup> The situation could indicate a high divorce rate between recently converted Christian women and their pagan husbands. It seems possible that the influx of “widows” into the Ephesian congregation included women who were never married as well as divorced women. Thus, the situation was more complex than a casual reading might indicate.<sup>7</sup>

The widows were pleased to see a major problem addressed by the church. However, in relieving one problem, the congregation was suddenly confronted with two new problems. The lifestyle of the widows was offensive to the society in which the church was located. The culture of the day objected to the free, and what must have appeared to them to be a useless, lifestyle of the widows. The second problem for the church was that the large influx of “widows” provided a natural avenue of defection to the heretics. Paul was compelled to make some serious adjustments to the otherwise compassionate response of the congregation. His recommendations were a common sense response to the problems, though they were no doubt questioned even at that time. This presents a truth that must again be stressed—*leaders are sometimes required to make decisions that others will consider cold or insensitive.*

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<sup>6</sup> Jouette M. Bassler, “The Widows Tale: A Fresh Look at 1 Tim 5:3-16,” Journal of Biblical Literature, Victor Paul Furnish (ed.), 1984, 34-5

<sup>7</sup> Bassler, op. cit., 23-41



**THE PRESCRIPTION** — “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.”

I wish it was not necessary to say that marriage is being dreadfully perverted in this day, but marriage *is* being dreadfully perverted in this day. As a society, we have become so focused on personal gratification that we imagine this to be the sole purpose for marriage. Of course, anyone holding such a view holds an aberrant view of marriage. Marriage is a means of healthy sexual fulfilment, to be sure. However, it is far more than that. Marriage is a means of building one another, of bringing godly children into the world and of honouring God. The marriage relationship is meant to reflect Christ’s union to His church [see **EPHESIANS 5:22-33**]. In marriage, God seeks godly offspring [see **MALACHI 2:15**]. As Christians, we do well to remember this, rejecting succumbing to the modern distortions of what marriage is to be.

In urging remarriage, Paul exalts the institution. He does this through his use of four present tense infinitives, the first of which emphasises the need for the younger widows to remarry. The Apostle’s position calling for remarriage was essential in view of the teaching of the false teachers; the heresy they were promoting was destroying the reputation of the faithful and harming the cause of Christ. Therefore, remarriage was not only preferable, it was vital in the face of this assault on the gift of marriage that God had given.

Perhaps an emphasis on marriage should be given again in this modern day. Marriage should not only be exalted, it should be encouraged among the faithful. This is but a variation on something Paul had written to the Corinthians. “If [the unmarried] cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion” [**1 CORINTHIANS 7:9**].

Paul then uses a second infinitive when he says that when these widows remarry they should bear children. Earlier, Paul had emphasised that women fulfil their primary God-given role when they raise and nurture the next generation [see **1 TIMOTHY 2:15**].<sup>8</sup> The same emphasis is provided here. This appears odious to modern minds; but it may be because we have rejected the teaching of God’s Word. Children are presented in the Word as “a heritage from the LORD” [**PSALM 127:3**]; the Word also declares, “Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with [children]” [**PSALM 127:5**]. God gives children, despite our arrogance in presuming to know where children come from. Because we can describe in rudimentary fashion the biology involved in the process of union of the sperm and the egg, we imagine we know all there is to know. Nevertheless, it remains that we really don’t control children; truly children are “a heritage from the LORD.”

The third infinitive given is that the remarried widow should manage her household. This is a truly remarkable statement in light of that ancient culture. Women were to be quiet and to have no role other than bearing children. However, the term Paul uses is powerful, for it indicates that women are to rule over their house. These widows were being elevated to a lofty position in that ancient society. Her husband was to provide the resources through his labour, and she was to manage them for the care of her husband and children. I understand that some will denigrate this biblical ideal as a reversion to the 50s, a “Father Knows Best” society or an “Ozzie and Harriet” world. However, families were stronger when society held a biblical view of marriage and family, and children were far happier.

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<sup>8</sup> See Michael Stark, “Saved Through Childbearing,” preached 4 August 2013, <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/clientimages/42652/sermonarchive/1%20timothy%202.15%20saved%20through%20childbearing.pdf>

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The fourth infinitive Paul used warned against giving the adversary an occasion for slander. The devil is named appropriately, for his name speaks of slander. When Paul warns that the adversary must not be given occasion to slander, he did not specify Satan as the adversary. Rather, Paul indicates anyone who opposes the Faith and seeks to halt the advance of the knowledge of Christ in our world. If the widows remarry, bear children and manage their households, the adversary will have no occasion for slander. If the widows fail to heed the first three infinitives, they expose the church to slander through their actions. Just as the elders and deacons have a responsibility to do nothing to injure the reputation of the assembly, so these younger widows are also charged to do nothing that would expose the congregation to slander.

Our modern focus on personal satisfaction and personal gratification has weakened the concept of marriage, permitting the redefinition that is now being imposed on society. The final bulwark against utter dissolution of the concept of marriage is the Word of God and those churches that adhere to what is written; and the churches are crumbling faster than I dare believe in the face of the unrelenting assault. The Apostle taught that the responsibility of widows who remarried was to bear children and to manage their households. In doing this, they would give the adversary no occasion for slander.

Ultimately, all who name the Name of Christ are to determine they will so live that they honour Christ the Lord. Each one professing the name of the Master must avoid giving those who stand opposed to righteousness opportunity to speak ill of us. Peter admonishes believers, “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation” [1 PETER 2:12].

It is impossible to keep one’s conduct honourable if there is no relationship to God who is good. One who has never been born from above cannot possibly live a life that is pleasing to God, much less a life that is honourable to Him. To be born from above and into God’s Family is the first need for any individual. This is the reason Christ the Lord came to earth. He gave His own life as a sacrifice because of our sin. He was crucified, certified as dead and buried. Conquering death, hell and the grave, he burst the bonds of death and rose from the tomb. Walking among witnesses, He was seen before He ascended into the heavens where He is seated at the right hand of the Father. Now, He calls all who will to receive the forgiveness of sin and the new life that He offers through faith in His Name.

The Word of God calls us to life. “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Master,’ believing in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be set free. It is with the heart that one believes and is made right with the Father and with the mouth that one agrees with God and is set at liberty.”<sup>9</sup> The Word concludes with this call first cited by the Prophet, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved” [ROMANS 10:13]. Our invitation to you is to believe and to be saved. Amen.

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<sup>9</sup> Free translation of ROMANS 10:9, 10.