

QUESTION: Why did the Apostle Paul tell Timothy not to enroll young widows? Does this mean young widows shouldn't be helped at all?

Answer: Before addressing this specific question, let's first understand the biblical context and qualifications laid out in Scripture regarding widows in the church.

In the early church, there was a practice of supporting the elderly, particularly those who were very old, unable to work, or had no family to care for them, such as children or grandchildren. The church had a responsibility to care for those who were in true need.

However, not every elderly person who joined the church was automatically given support. There were specific criteria for those who were eligible for help, which we find in the book of 1 Timothy.

Biblical Qualifications for Enrolling Widows

In 1 Timothy 5:9-10, Paul gives clear guidelines for widows who should be supported by the church:

"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.”*

These criteria highlight a few key things:

1. She must be a widow: If she still has a husband, he is responsible for supporting her. The church should not take on this burden if it is unnecessary.
2. She must be 60 years old or older: This age limit suggests that younger widows still have the strength and ability to work, provide for themselves, and contribute to the community. The church is called to prioritize those who are truly in need, such as the elderly who can no longer support themselves.
3. She must have been the wife of one husband: This implies a record of marital faithfulness. A woman who has been married to many men

does not meet the standards for enrollment. The church honors those who have shown consistency and faithfulness in their marital lives.

4. She must have a record of good works: The widow must have lived a life of service and good deeds, showing love for others. The Bible emphasizes that a widow's qualifications include acts of kindness, hospitality, and support for those in need, reflecting her ongoing faith and dedication to God.

Theological Significance of These Qualifications

In James 1:27, the Bible gives a clear definition of true religion, which includes caring for widows and orphans:

"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."

Thus, the church is called to care for those who are vulnerable. However, the Bible also teaches that resources should be used wisely. In this case,

the support for widows is directed toward those who have no other means of support and have shown a life of service to others.

In 1 Timothy 5:3-5, Paul emphasizes the responsibility of families to care for their own:

“Honor widows who are truly widows.

4 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.

5 She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day.”

This passage emphasizes that it is a family's duty to care for widows within the family. If a widow has children or grandchildren, it is their responsibility to provide for her, not the church's. The church should focus on those who are truly alone and have no one to care for them.

Why Should Young Widows Not Be Enrolled?

1. To Prevent Burdening the Church: Young widows are typically still able

to work and support themselves. In 1 Timothy 5:11-12, Paul explains that the church should not provide support to young widows because they may abandon their faith and turn to worldly desires:

“But refuse to enroll younger widows, for when their passions are drawn away from Christ, they desire to marry, 12 and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith.”

Young widows, particularly those under 60, are encouraged to remarry and have families, rather than relying on the church for support. This helps them stay focused on their responsibilities and prevents spiritual distractions. The church should not bear the burden of those who can still care for themselves.

2. To Prevent Idleness and Temptation: Paul also warns that young widows, when left idle, may become gossipers and busybodies, engaging in negative behaviors that could harm their spiritual lives and their witness. In 1 Timothy 5:13, he writes:

“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.”

Idleness can lead to negative behaviors that take young widows away from their devotion to Christ. The church must prioritize supporting those who have no means of support and are committed to serving God with their time.

3. Encouragement to Remarry: Instead of relying on the church, Paul encourages younger widows to remarry and focus on raising children and managing their households. In 1 Timothy 5:14, he says:

“So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander.”

Having a family and taking responsibility for a household provides young

widows with purpose and structure, keeping them busy and focused on godly living. This helps them avoid falling into temptation and distractions.

Not All Young Widows Are Like This

It is important to note that not all young widows fit this pattern. There are some, like Anna the prophetess in Luke 2:36-38, who remain faithful and devoted to God, despite being a widow at a young age:

*“And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin,
37 and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.
38 And coming up at that very hour, she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.”*

Anna remained faithful to God through prayer and fasting, even after the death of her husband. She was a true example of devotion and service, despite her widowhood.

Conclusion

The Bible calls the church to care for widows, especially those who are truly in need. However, the church is not to bear the burden of supporting widows who are capable of supporting themselves or who have family to care for them. Young widows, in particular, are encouraged to remarry and focus on family responsibilities to avoid spiritual distractions. The church's resources should be directed toward those who truly have no other means of support and who have shown a life of service to others, reflecting the biblical principles of compassion and stewardship.

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