

1 Timothy 5:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Honour widows that are widows indeed.

Analysis

Honour widows that are widows indeed (Χήρας τίμα τὰς ὄντως χήρας, Chēras tima tas ontōs chēras)—'honor widows who are truly widows.' Timaō means to honor, value, care for—including financial support (5:17-18 uses the same word for paying elders). Ontōs means 'really, truly, actually'—genuine widows.

Paul will define 'widows indeed' in verses 5, 9-10: women without family support who trust in God and live godly lives. The church has responsibility to care for vulnerable widows, but not all who have lost husbands qualify—some have family who should support them (5:4, 8, 16).

This begins Paul's extended discussion of widow care (5:3-16), addressing a major practical issue in the early church. With no social safety net, widows were among society's most vulnerable. The church's care for 'widows indeed' demonstrated the gospel's power to create a radically compassionate community.

Historical Context

In the ancient world, widows without sons faced destitution—unable to inherit property or work most jobs. The early church established an order of widows for official support (Acts 6:1-6, 9:39-41). But limited resources required careful stewardship. Paul gives criteria to distinguish widows who genuinely need church support from those with other means.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. What does it mean to 'honor' widows—how does financial support express honor?
2. How can churches discern who genuinely needs assistance versus who has other support?
3. What modern vulnerable populations require the church's care as 'widows' did in Paul's time?

Interlinear Text

χήρας	τίμα	τὰς	ὥτως	χήρας
that are widows	Honour	G3588	indeed	that are widows
G5503	G5091		G3689	G5503

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 27:19 (Parallel theme): Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, Amen.

Acts 6:1 (Parallel theme): And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.

Deuteronomy 14:29 (Parallel theme): And the Levite, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest.

Deuteronomy 10:18 (Parallel theme): He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment.

Exodus 20:12 (Parallel theme): Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

Deuteronomy 16:11 (Parallel theme): And thou shalt rejoice before the LORD thy God, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gates, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are among you, in the place which the LORD thy God hath chosen to place his name there.

Deuteronomy 16:14 (Parallel theme): And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite, the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are within thy gates.

1 Peter 2:17 (Parallel theme): Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.