

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

C1129 – August 31, 2011 – 1 Timothy 5:3-16
Functioning Deacons: Honoring Widows Indeed

Alright, this is the class on church leadership and we're working within the biblical model of church leadership which is called the Federal, Presbyterian or Elder Model. This model is where the members of the congregation allocate some of their freedom to a group of men who rule the household of God. This group of men is divided into two offices that work together as a team; the office of elder and the office of deacon. There are distinct lines between these offices so far as their responsibilities are concerned, though at times their responsibilities overlap. Fundamentally we have seen that the elders responsibilities are in the spiritual needs sphere and that involves two main categories, prayer and ministry of the word. Fundamentally the deacons responsibilities are in the physical needs sphere, they are assistants to the elders and so the physical needs are anything really that is a physical need; helping widows and orphans, visitation, building maintenance, if you have a building, any kind of physical need that arises the elders can delegate to the deacons so they can devote their time to prayer and the ministry of the word, that ought never to be neglected.

And so what I've tried to do in organizing the passages that address church leadership is categorize them and there are four basic categories of passages. One is the Formation of the offices of elder and deacon. We learned that the office of deacon was formed in Acts 6 due to the widow's dispute. Actually the office of deacon formed before the office of elder because originally the elder responsibilities were being carried out by the apostles. But when the widow's dispute arose the apostles decided to have the congregation nominate a group of men to serve them in the physical needs sphere so they could devote time to prayer and the word. Later as the apostles moved out of Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria they couldn't attend to all the teaching and prayer needs in Jerusalem so they appointed elders in Jerusalem (Acts 11:30). And as the

witness moved out of Judea and Samaria into the remotest parts of the earth then of course elders were needed in the new church plants and Paul appointed them and others like Titus and Timothy were deputized to go into these new churches Paul couldn't reach and appoint elders (Acts 14:23). And we can imagine that as the elders in these new churches began to have their time eaten up by various disputes and needs they followed the pattern of the original apostles and had their congregations nominate deacons who they would then put in charge of certain tasks so they would be freed up to prayer and ministry of the word. So we have showed how these two offices were formed, that's the first category of passage you find in the NT.

The second category of passage is the Qualifications of men who want to serve as elders or deacons who are nominated by the congregation of disciples. The elders are appointed by other elders but the deacons are appointed by the congregation of disciples. So there are some different procedures so far as how the nominations occur. There are also differences in that someone who becomes an elder has to want to be an elder, has to show strong desire for being an elder but a deacon doesn't have to have any desire, he just has to be nominated by the congregation of disciples because he is the man who the congregation wants to serve them. So we have seen the lists of elder qualifications in 1 Tim 3 and Tit 1 and we have seen the list of deacon qualifications in 1 Tim 3. These lists overlap to a large degree which shows you that the functions of these two offices do overlap. But they also differ and the main difference is in the teaching department. Elders have to be apt to teach, deacon's don't. Another difference is that the deacon's wives are explicitly mentioned as having to be qualified. The reason is because of the nature of the deacon's functions. He's going to find himself in sensitive situations with other women and with children and therefore his wife is an invaluable asset in handling these sensitive needs. So both elders and deacons have to be highly qualified men and we said these were character qualifications, so it's an issue of character, what kind of a man is this? Not what did he do 30 years ago in the donut shop. Who is this man now that God has worked in his life and brought him to maturity? Is he blameless so far as his character is concerned?

The third category of passage is the Function of elders and deacons. This kind of passage is helpful because it helps to see these men functioning in office. Since elders function in the spiritual needs sphere with prayer and ministry

of the word we covered a NT example of each. In Acts 15 the elders solve a doctrinal dispute, that is particularly a function of elders since they are the most mature men in the word of God and are equipped to solve doctrinal issues, they have a peculiar interest in this book and so they will search and search and search until they resolve it. In James 5 the elders pray for the restoration of a fallen believer, that also is a function of elders since they have a high character like Elijah and they can pray in faith and God will listen to their prayers because they listen to His word when a fallen believer cannot. So those are real life examples of things that elders would do, they are not exhaustive of what elders would do but I give those to you as examples so that you have some kind of model to get an idea of things they would do.

Today we turn to the Function of deacons and it conjures up images of Acts 6 again. Acts 6 is the formation of the office of deacon, granted it was somewhat in a proto form, but nonetheless, it's right to cite Acts 6 as the formation of the office and it was formed to solve a widows dispute. They had a lot of widows in Jerusalem because Jewish men wanted to die in Jerusalem so they could be buried there. So right away the church in Jerusalem was inundated with a lot of widows and there were two groups of widows, the Hellenistic Jewish widows and the Native Jewish widows. These two groups didn't see eye to eye on every issue because they were two different cultures and though they shared things in common, they kind of looked at each other as strange because of their idiosyncrasies. Those idiosyncrasies caused a conflict between the two groups and the office of deacon was formed to solve it because if the apostles didn't form a group of men to solve it then it's going to eat up all their time and then what happens to prayer and teaching the word? It goes down the drain. Then more problems are going to rise and you're eventually going to have a whole heap of problems and no way to solve them all. Satan has derailed that church. So the deacons are an absolutely fundamental office, they are absolutely critical to the good health of the local church to handle these kinds of things, otherwise the pastor or the elders spend all their time with these nitpicky people and the whole church suffers from lack of good Bible teaching bathed in prayer.

So today if you'd turn to 1 Tim 5, I want to give an example of one of the functions of deacons. You can already guess it relates to widows because of Acts 6. But let me repeat that their function is not limited to widows; it also

includes orphans. Children are important in the body of Christ and what do you do about the occasional orphan so far as a father figure; who is going to be a father figure to that orphan? Maybe a deacon. Or what about visitation of the sick or elderly? Is that something the quote “senior pastor” is supposed to do? I don’t think so. That actually can be and probably should be a shared responsibility of pasturing elders and deacons. So if the visitation is eating up all the time the elder needs to pray and prepare to teach the word then he needs to delegate it to a deacon. That’s why I can’t always show up when someone needs visitation, there’s just too much and one person can only do so much, other times I can. So these decisions have to be made with discretion and wisdom. If I’m ahead on my studies then I can get away and visit you myself, but if I’m behind then it’s stupid for me to run around making house calls because in the end I’m going to end up neglecting everybody else in the entire church by not giving them sound doctrine. So while it’s good to visit, it’s better to teach and you can never let things that are good substitute for things that are better. That’s a principle of good leadership.

Now in 1 Tim 5 we have Paul’s instructions to Timothy. Remember, Timothy was at Ephesus. Paul’s not at Ephesus. Paul is writing instructions to Timothy at Ephesus. So the instructions, the commands, are going to be to Timothy directly but I think, having written chapter 3 where the qualifications of deacon are listed that this is a function that would eventually be handed over to the deacons. What function is that? Selecting and keeping a widows indeed list. Notice, it is not the church’s responsibility to support widows. It is the church’s responsibility to support widows indeed! There’s a very big difference. And this chapter shows how to discern whether a widow is a widow indeed or just a widow. And I think it would be the deacons who would do this work of discernment, do the investigation, come up with a list of widows indeed and distribute financial or other needs to the widows indeed as required.

Starting in verse 3 he instructs. **Honor widows who are widows indeed;** that is the basic principle of the entire passage, and it is a command, it is not an option in the church, it is a command. And if the church does not take care of the widows indeed then the church is not taking care of some of the people that God is most interested in, His eye is on the widows indeed and He has assigned the local church to take care of them.

But, there are qualifications, verse 4, **but if any widow has children or grandchildren, they must first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God.** Now watch because he's saying the local church should not just rush off and support a widow. Apparently that's what they did at Ephesus and it led to a disaster we'll see down in vv 14-15. So first, the family of the widow has the responsibility. He says **they**, that is, any **children or grandchildren must first learn to practice piety**, that word translated practice piety is the word *eusebein* and it means "to show profound reverence for in a system of reciprocity." Put in practical every day language, "They wiped your butt, you wipe theirs." God built the family to be a system of reciprocity, where we help one another. This is a duty, an obligation. And unfortunately in our society there is no respect for the elderly anymore and a lot of kids and grandkids could care less about grandma, just wish she would die so she wouldn't be a burden anymore. And the pagan culture has developed the arguments that old people aren't even full people anymore because of quality of life. But biblical culture says that all people on earth are full people, people made in the image of God and they have integrity and deserve respect and loving care. So God says it is the family's obligation to take care of their widowed mothers and grandmothers in their old age because they took care of you. And it will do no good to say what the Pharisees said, "Oh, mom, you need help, well, I already devoted that money to God." Jesus said by saying that you are violating your responsibilities and invalidating the word of God. The word of God says the first priority for taking care of widows lies with the offspring of the widows, the children, the grandchildren and today, the great grandchildren since apparently we have 12 year old girls having babies. But the principle is you take care of your own; you don't throw them on the church. For, verse 4, **this is acceptable in the sight of God.** This is what God expects and this is our duty to our ancestors. It will be handsomely rewarded.

Verse 5, **But she who is a widow indeed and has been left alone**, that is, either she doesn't have any children or grandchildren living or they've abandoned her because they're too selfish to take on the awesome responsibility of taking care of her, in that situation, **the widow indeed who has fixed her hope on God and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day** she should be taken care of by the church and the deacons should head this up. They had ways of doing this in the early church.

One way was each Friday to distribute funds for 14 meals; it was enough for two meals/day for the next week. But the point here is that this woman has no one to help her and assuming she meets all the other criteria that we'll see shortly, if she has no family or they have abandoned her, and she is then **fixing her hope on God**, hoping that God will help her, and she continues to wait for her needs to be met and she prays night and day for her needs to be met, then the deacons recognize this and they are going to be the channel by which her prayers are answered and her needs are met.

But verse 6 excludes some widows, **But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives.** And the word **wanton pleasure** is poorly translated, it doesn't have sexual connotations, it means she's a woman who lives beyond her means, she spends money, she goes to the mall and spends way too much money, she is wasteful and the church should not support such a woman because by doing so it will only be enabling her to continue living in death while she is yet still alive. Because to spend more than you have is to live in death because debt is death. And our country could learn a little lesson from this. They should have learned it long, long ago. I don't think they will learn it but nonetheless, debt is death, you're enslaved to someone else, they're a slave to the lender. And anyone who spends beyond their means is **dead even while they live.**

Verse 7, **Prescribe these things well** or "transmit them," command these things well, you know, over and over and over Timothy I want you to cover how important these things are so they get it. Why? Because people have to hear the truth over and over and over before they get it. They say a genius has to hear something seven times before they get it and they say the average person has to hear it 25 times. So over and over tell them this **so that they [the widows] may be above reproach**, that is, that they may be blameless. So the deacons have the responsibility to make sure the widows understand you can't be going around wasting your money, we're not going to support you if you do that because that would be mooching and we're not supporting your habits of going down to Dillard's and getting a new purse every week. This is for food, this is for basic necessities of life. So the church does have a say, after it has given her the money, in how she spends the money. Because if it doesn't monitor this then the widow is not **above reproach** and she's open to charges of wastefulness. So it is very important that she understand this is for basic necessities, it is not for splurging.

Verse 8, **But if anyone does not provide for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.** The principle here is that even unbelievers take care of their family members so if we don't then we're worse than them. But let's look at more. First of all this is a 1st class condition, if and assuming the condition is true, assuming someone does not take care of their own, then he has denied the Christian faith and is worse than an unbeliever. So evidently the family is believing and one of the good things then that's not always the case now is the family was close, they all went to the same church, so accountability to take care of them was built in. Another thing this verse shows is you can deny the faith by your actions and in this case it's very serious because even unbelievers do what believers should do, and they do it having no philosophical basis for doing it, nevertheless, they recognize because they are made in the image of God, that it is their responsibility to take care of their family. Another thing is that it's not just **provide** for them but the word actually means "to think about it beforehand and to prepare for it." In other words, let's say your father is about to die and your mother is in pretty good health still, you might think ahead to the situation that's coming when he dies. Has he saved up for her? (which godly men should do) Does she have some income? How much? What kinds of payments does she have? All those are matters that you are to think about ahead of time so that when the time comes you are in a position to take care of her. But if you don't do that and you're foolish and then it happens and you can't handle the financial burden and then your actions deny the faith and you're worse than an unbeliever. God says it's a very serious thing to take care of your own family. That is what God expects and that is what is acceptable before Him. Anything else is not. You say it's hard, yeah it is, learn a little selflessness; it was hard to raise you out of brathood too.

Now let's move on to the basic qualifications to be put on a widows list. The principle is that the deacons are going to have to form a list by going through all the widows in the church and subjecting them to this criteria; then if they qualify, put them on the list. Needs and all of that will also have to be evaluated. But verse 9, **A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old,** it's worded a little strange, the point is if she's 59, no, if she's 60 yes. At the time someone entered old age at 60, probably today it would not be much older, maybe 70-80, the point is that a woman of this age was unable to work to support herself and therefore she could be put

on a widows list and supported by the local church. So number one is an age criteria, age 60 and above in Paul's day. But I think the application for us is to consider whether she is of an age where she can work to support herself or not.

And also verse 9, **having been the wife of one man**, or better, a one man woman, this is the exact same qualification of the elder and the deacon, except they had to be one woman kind of men and this is saying the widow has to be a one man kind of woman, she had to be dedicated to her husband and loyal to him when he was still living. It doesn't mean she was married only one time in her whole life because later in v 14 Paul is going to make a statement about younger widows remarrying. So the point here is the same as in the elder and deacon qualification, that they were dedicated to their husband.

Verse 10, **having a reputation for good works**, and the Greek text indicates this stands at the heading of a list of good works and the good works are the "if" phrases that follow in the rest of the verse. Since this heading is in the present tense then this is *at the time* of consideration - at the time of consideration has she developed a reputation for good works? So a deacon would be interested in evaluating this widow's past and determining whether she had an extensive resume of good works that led to a good reputation. And if she has a good reputation then she would qualify on this point.

And then we have the list of good works in verse 10, they are all 1st class conditions, and in the aorist tense, so they're looking back at her life. You'll notice the conjunction "if" used over and over, these good works are all 1st class conditions meaning if and assuming she has these good works, put her on the list. First, **if she has brought up children**, not if she bore children, she may have had 25 children but if she didn't bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord then she doesn't qualify. Because the point of this word "brought up" is that she actually brought them up, meaning she brought them up spiritually and physically. She looked out for her children's spiritual well-being by speaking to them about spiritual things, and she cared for them physically, providing for their daily needs. Second, **if she has shown hospitality to strangers**. When there were strangers did she take them in and care for them, this was common in the 1st century and would

have been done under her husbands supervision and protection. Third, **if she has washed the saints' feet**, this is another service, all these are helping services which shows you the role of the woman in the assembly, she helps her children, she helps strangers, she serves the saints, all servant functions. This one washing the saints' feet was a common practice, as people walked down the dusty roads of the ancient world and arrived at your home they would have dust all over their feet and ankles and so a hospitable homemaker would wash their feet as they entered, it was a service of humility. Fourth, **if she has assisted those in distress**, people come under difficult times and this might include things like providing meals, helping with household duties, etc...those kinds of services. And fifth, **if she has devoted herself to every good work**, a general statement that sums up the list, if there was a need, did she provide for the need? Or did she close her heart to those in need? Is she a servant? If she is a servant then put her on the list, as she has served others so she should be served, assuming she is 60 years old and has no family or has been abandoned by her family. But you'll notice an important element throughout the passage is that this is reciprocal care, that is, if she has living family members they should take care of her because she took care of them. And if she doesn't or she's been abandoned, then the church should take care of her because she took care of them. That's the point, she was selfless and now it's time for others to be selfless and care for her.

Verse 11, more limitations, **But refuse to put younger widows on the list, for when they feel sensual desires in disregard of Christ, they want to get married thus incurring condemnation, because they have set aside their previous pledge.** As compared to the older widows they are young, they're under 60, they can still work, Paul has some instruction, do not put them on the list, and it's a command, do not do it. Then he explains why. **for when they feel sensual desires** or what it says in the Greek is when they come under the control of strong physical desires, they want a man, for whatever reason, then that cuts them off from Christ. What do you mean it cuts them off from Christ? Well, we don't mean they lose their salvation. You can't lose that. The point is that if a woman is put on the list she had to make a vow that she was going to remain unmarried, so she would make this pledge to Christ, I'm only married to Christ and I'm going to dedicate the rest of my life to Christ, that way I don't have split loyalties. And the problem Paul says is that younger widows at first may say,

I don't want to remarry, I want to be married only to Christ, but then they start having strong desires to be married and then they get married and they break their vow to Christ. And Paul says, to avoid that situation altogether, because it's a terrible thing to break a vow as you'll see, to break a vow with Christ is to come into a vow with Satan, God takes promises and vows very seriously, much more serious than we do, we just overlook it, God doesn't, it's a serious thing to put your word out there and break it. And Paul says in verse 11, when they do this, when they take this vow, Oh, I'm going to be a widow for life and the church starts supporting her then one day she remarries, which is perfectly legitimate to do, if you didn't take a vow, but if you take the vow then look at verse 12, she **incurs condemnation because she set aside her previous pledge**, that is, she comes under divine judgment. Now she's under discipline because she went back on her word. So Paul tells the church don't even let a widow get in this situation where she's torn between her vow to Christ and her physical attraction to some other man. Because what she's going to do is break her vow to Christ and marry the man. Then she's going to be under divine discipline and so just avoid the whole thing, don't put a younger widow on the list, period! And apparently in verse 15 this had already happened in Ephesus and when they break the vow with Christ they do what? They are turning aside to follow Satan. Because once you make a vow to God you better keep it. What does the preacher say in Ecclesiastes 5? Better to never make a vow than to make a vow and break it. It is a very bad idea to make vows to God and break them. And if you tell God you're going to do something you better do it or He's going to judge you, there's no wiggle room, you are locked in when you make a vow to God for the rest of your life or until you've fulfilled it. But there is no getting out of it. So it's better not to get in it in the first place. But do know that if you do get into one and you keep it, there is great reward. So it's a double edged kind of thing.

Verse 13, **At the same time they also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention.** That is, younger widows. Let's say the church put a younger widow on the list, then this widow has all this time on her hands and that's a bad idea. So she's going to learn how to be idle, that is "be inactive" and she has all this energy but nowhere to expend it so she's going to start running around town; it's a skill she acquires, an addiction, she's just got to get that energy out and so

she expends it getting herself in trouble, she's a troublemaker, not a servant, a troublemaker. That's why he says **and not merely idle**, that is, they don't just sit there on the couch, they may sit there a few hours and watch the boob tube but then they get restless and they want to go do something. So what do they do? Paul says, they are **gossips** and **busybodies**, **they** run around spreading news about everybody else in the church and meddling in everybody else's business, getting the latest dirt on everybody, which is pretty much all Facebook is, it's one big gossip train. Oh, what's so and so doing and I've got to keep up with every last breaking minute of everybody else's life. I'm not saying it can't be used as a valid communication tool, all I'm saying is that most of it is just an outlet for the addictive sin pattern of gossip and that there are things people put on there that shouldn't be public knowledge and that's what the end of the verse is saying, these younger widows, if the church enables them by financially supporting them, they'll run around house to house and **talk about** all kinds of **things not proper to mention**, they're just not fitting to talk about. And unfortunately people have a sinful inner urge to want to get the inside scoop on every little detail of other people's lives under the guise that well, I just want to be able to pray for it more intelligently, like they're some great prayer warriors, they're gossips. And that's why there is a balance to prayer requests. Be careful because on one hand you can be too general and then people don't really have anything to pray for, so and so needs prayer Lord, help them. On the other hand you can be too specific when you tell people to pray for things that are improper to talk about. But the point I think here is that when the church supports younger widows they are encouraging and supporting the sin pattern of gossip and meddling. And the consequences can be tragic. The tongue is a sword and a fire. As a sword it cuts deep and as a fire once let loose it sets the whole course of life on a path of destruction.

So don't put younger widows on the list, verse 14, instead, **I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach**. So Paul was not against remarriage, *if*, and I stress the *if*, *if* the woman was a widow. If her husband died so that she was widowed then she was free from that contract in the sight of God. But it's not true that Paul would condone remarriage after divorce. In fact in 1 Cor 7 he condemns it. This is not a big class on marriage, divorce and remarriage but the main idea is that once two people are joined they are one flesh they are in a contract before God. And as long as the two people are alive God

looks at them as one flesh so you can't remarry or else you're one flesh with this man and one flesh with this man and how far can this one flesh business go? So if you have it in your mind that a bill of divorce from the state is going to be recognized by God as the end of a marriage, you're wrong, death is the only thing God recognizes as ending a marriage contract. So if you're divorced Paul says in 1 Cor 7 you should reconcile, but if your spouse dies he says you can remarry because God recognizes that your prior one flesh relationship is ended. Now you are free to remarry which is what Paul wants them to do. Widows **I want to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach.** This is the best thing for them. They will be supported by their husband, they will learn to serve their children in bringing them up spiritually and providing for them physically, she will keep busy keeping house, all the things here in the verse are things that take up her time and improve her sanctification, because again, if you have time on your hands its a dangerous thing, and it's unfortunate that in American culture time on your hands, leisure time has become an idol. So you have to put that idol off, Paul says I want widows to keep busy and that's why the Prov 31 woman, if you look at the passage the overwhelming idea is she's who she is because she is a married woman with a family, she's spiritually mature because of her role as a wife and a mother, that stuff keeps her busy, not a busybody, busy working, being productive, caring for her family, keeping her home, all these things protect her spiritually, they all force her to grow spiritually, they are like a fence about her that keeps her from falling prey to the enemy. And I think the enemy here is Satan as verse 15 will make clear. Need I remind you that that Satan particularly hates women? Satan in Genesis 3 is set up in battle array against women; his strategy is to destroy women. He always infiltrates through the women, he always initiates deception among women, always, and God works exactly the opposite, God always works through men, He always initiates with men. It's a consistent pattern through the whole Bible, through all of history. And this is why the leadership in the home is the man and this is why the leadership in the church is the man. Because God works through the man. Satan tries to work through women. So here you have Paul instructing younger women to get married, to come under a man's authority, be supported by him, raise children, keep house, these are all the things that protect her from the enemy, they are a vanguard about her, they help her grow spiritually and if she gets cut slack in these areas it's going to lead to spiritual disaster. And the younger women today need to hear this like never before, with the rise of

consumerism where you have a machine to do everything for you, whether it's washing the clothes or the dishes or whatever, what it has created is leisure time and that is the death of a woman (it's the death of a man too by the way). We were not built to have leisure time on our hands, rest, yes, leisure time, no, and leisure time is an idol in America, we worship at the throne of leisure time. And America better wake up or it's going to find itself in more than a national disaster, a total collapse, war, chaos in the streets and everything else you can imagine

So it's clear Paul's instruction is don't put younger widows on the list but encourage them to get married, have babies, keep house, that is excellent spiritual advice. Verse 15, **for some have already turned aside to follow Satan.** Uh the problem is some of the younger widows at Ephesus were put on the list and they shouldn't have been. And it gave them leisure time, they had time on their hands and that is the end of a woman, they became easy targets for Satan, they turned **aside** from Christ **to follow** after **Satan.** And there is no middle road; either you are following Christ or following Satan. It is a black and white issue like heaven and hell, there is no third loyalty, it is either we follow Christ or we follow Satan. And a younger widow who is supported by the church will, generally speaking, turn aside from Christ to follow Satan.

Verse 16, **If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, she must assist them and the church must not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed.** Here Paul puts forth the situation where a wealthy woman, who is a believer, has widows that are depending on her, they're working in her home and she's supporting them, in that case she shouldn't dump them on the church, she should keep assisting them, so that, purpose clause, **so that the church...may assist those who are widows indeed.**

So the whole point of the passage is not whether we should or shouldn't identify widows indeed and support them but how to identify the ones that really have a need. And what can we say so far as a conclusion and some principles we can gather from this passage? First, the first opportunity of supporting of widows is the family unit. It is their responsibility, their awesome duty to care for their mothers and grandmothers who once cared for them. Second, if she has no family or the family has abandoned her but she is

being supported by some means already in place then she should continue to be supported by that means so as to relieve the burden from the church. Third, if she has no family or the family has abandoned her and if she has no other support already in place then the church should consider her for the widows indeed list because the primary thing is that the church not be burdened by excessive financial expenditures to support people who can or should be supported by other means. They are only to help widows indeed. Fourth, to be put on the list a widow must not be able to support herself. The text says she must be at least 60 years old. But I think that age has flex in it since old age at the time was objectively considered to be 60 years old. Today there is no objective number in our society, I found reports as young as 27 and as old as 80, probably 70-80 would be old age today. And I think the point is not an exact age *per se* but rather inability to work to support herself. In that case she should be considered. Fifth, she must meet the character qualifications in vv 9-10, one man kind of woman, serving others, that's the primary idea, has she learned to serve others through the venues designed by God to teach women to serve others; the training of children, hospitality to strangers, washing the saints feet as a metaphor for serving fellow believers in the church. Through those venues has she built up a good reputation for good works? Sixth, it's very serious to follow these criteria for identifying widows indeed because failure to do so is rebellion against God and leads women away from Christ and toward Satan.

Finally, I think the identification of widows indeed and the keeping of a list of widows indeed is a deacon responsibility. I don't think it's an elder activity even though Paul is telling Timothy the elder here to identify the widows indeed. I think Timothy would have gotten this started but that his main responsibility was prayer and teaching of the word and so it would be relinquished to able deacons. And again, I don't think this is exhaustive of what the deacons would do, they would also distribute benevolence as they did in Acts 6, they would help with orphans, their wives could help them in all of these mercy ministries and further they could do anything the elders delegate them to do that would free up the elders to prayer and ministry of the word.

[Back To The Top](#)

Copyright (c) Fredericksburg Bible Church 2011