

The Young and the Restless

¹¹ But refuse *the* younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, ¹² having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. ¹³ And besides they learn *to be* idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not. ¹⁴ Therefore I desire that *the* younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. ¹⁵ For some have already turned aside after Satan. ¹⁶ If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows. (1 Timothy 5:11–16)

The writer Thomas Sowell is an African American professor and intellectual. He has written a lot of economics, on wealth and poverty. Being a black American, he has also spoken a lot on the causes of crime, and fatherlessness and gangs in the inner-city ghettos of black America. “A vastly expanded welfare state in the 1960s destroyed the black family, which had survived centuries of slavery and generations of racial oppression. In 1960, before this expansion of the welfare state, 22 percent of black children were raised with only one parent. By 1985, 67 percent of black children were raised with either one parent or no parent.”

Sowell is pointing out that when the government began providing free money to able-bodied people, it didn't lift people out of poverty. Instead, it increased drugs, alcoholism, teen pregnancies. Why? Because people with just enough money, and too much time, go in the wrong direction.

Charles Spurgeon: “Man was not made for an idle life, labour is evidently his proper condition. Even when man was perfect he was placed in the garden, not to admire its flowers, but to keep it and to dress it. If he needed to work when he was perfect, much more does he require the discipline of labour now that he is fallen”.

When it comes to the problem of idle people having too much time and too few demands, the church should never be part of that problem. The church should never contribute to the problem of able-bodied people with full stomachs and empty schedules.

But the church could fall into that trap if it dispenses its money in thoughtless ways. The church is a place of mercy, and Christians should be the very soul of generosity, and that leads people to think that it should just give wherever there is need, like air filling a vacuum.

But we saw the last time that even when it came to the neediest people in the time of the New Testament – widows – there were still strict rules about which widows could be enrolled. There were no pension plans or state welfare, so a woman who lost her husband, and had no supporting family, and no ability to work or remarry was truly destitute. Paul gave the qualifications for church support of these in verses 1-10 and 16 of 1 Timothy 5. But now in verses 11 to 15, Paul gives us the negative, who should not be enrolled and why. And it all has to do with this problem of the danger of creating idle people.

I. The Directive: Refuse To Support the Young and Able-Bodied

¹¹ But refuse *the* younger widows;

Paul commands; refuse, turn down, do not accept the younger widows onto the church's list of supported widows. Quite simply, don't offer, and if they ask, say no.

Well, that sounds harsh to our ears. He is going to give us the reasons for this rejection in the next phrases. But for now, isn't this harsh and unkind? After all, didn't Jesus give a blanket command in the Sermon on the Mount, “Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.”(Matthew 5:42)? Well, this should teach us that Scripture interprets

Scripture. Here we have a plain, unambiguous command given by Paul – 'don't give to certain people', which must be harmonised with the more open-ended statement by the Lord Jesus, "Give to him who asks you". The clear must interpret the unclear, and so what the Lord meant was not "give to every individual who ever asks you for something". What he meant was, don't withhold from those who need and who qualify for your mercy. Or to put it in the exact biblical words of Proverbs 3:27: "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, When it is in the power of your hand to do so."

Giving is not indiscriminate, not some laughing Father Christmas, throwing gifts into a crowd. Giving is intelligent, targeted, rational. It gives to those to whom it is due.

Those to whom good is *due* is exactly what this passage is answering. Those who are widows indeed are those, as we saw, who have no living family, who are past the age to be able to remarry or work for themselves, and who have lived lives of faithful, generous service of others.

But younger widows are not those that this special mercy is due to.

Why not? Well, if you take the qualifications of the real widow, the widow indeed, as Paul put it, the younger widow is the opposite of that. She almost certainly still has living family to support her: brothers, sisters, in-laws maybe even still living parents can all help her. She definitely has what the destitute widow does not have: she has time on her side. She can remarry, and thereby find support. And while this isn't what a young widow wants to think about, the book of Ruth is a beautiful portrait of two widows, Naomi and Ruth. Naomi is too old to remarry, but Ruth is not. And Naomi seeks out remarriage for Ruth, so that she can rebuild her life under the support of Boaz. The other thing that her youth gives her is the ability to work. In Roman culture, her work would usually have been quite physical: weaving, basket-making, dyeing clothes, picking or growing food or preparing it, crafts. If a widow was still young, she had the physical strength to earn some money and support herself, unlike the older widow.

This is the primary reason Paul does not consider the younger widow to be a destitute widow: she still has means of support available to her.

But the other side of why Paul doesn't want this support to go to the younger widow is because of the dangers it will bring. Here you will put some able-bodied, young women on a kind of monthly or weekly stipend, give her money to live off, while she is not working, has no husband, no family to take care. You have the classic situation of welfare, the universal basic income, call it what you want: able bodied, youthful people who don't have to work because they have money coming from someone else. Instead of being occupied with the busyness of hard work, they have basic needs taken care of, and plenty of time.

Now what is the result of too much time and no necessity?

II. The Dangers of Idle Womanhood

for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, ¹² having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. ¹³ And besides they learn *to be* idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not.

Verses 11-13 list out three dangers of idle womanhood.

The first is promiscuity. for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, ¹² having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith.

When they have begun to grow wanton against Christ translates a word that means to become governed by sensual desires, indulge lustfully. The young widow with too much time and no financial demands can be tempted into immorality.

Now the problem here is not normal bodily appetites, and the problem is certainly not that she wants to marry. Indeed, Paul is going to counsel her to do exactly that in verse 15: remarry. So her problem is not that. The problem is that here you have a young widow who is now on the church's payroll as it were, she is supposed to be dedicated to doing a certain amount of service for the church. But instead, with money taken care of and too much time, she may be tempted to lust after an unequally yoked marriage. She may be led by lust and sheer infatuation, and so turn away from her profession of faith, her testimony to marry an unbeliever. That's the most likely meaning of "because they have cast off their first faith." For a young woman who claims to be a believer, and especially one whom the church is now supporting, for her to deliberately marry an unbeliever is a real, public denial of her first loyalty.

Idleness and immorality travel together. In fact, look into history and you will see that the idle have almost always indulged in immorality. Too much leisure, boredom and no demands, and sexual sin is right around the corner. Look at the decadent Roman emperors, look at the leisured elite of Greece, look at the bored aristocrats in the palace of Versailles during Louis the 14th's reign. Look at the immoral woman of Proverbs 7: she has too much time on her hands:

¹⁰ And there a woman met him, *With* the attire of a harlot, and a crafty heart. ¹¹ She *was* loud and rebellious, Her feet would not stay at home. ¹² At times *she was* outside, at times in the open square, Lurking at every corner. (Proverbs 7:10–12)

One of the safeguards against lust is to have plenty of responsibility in your life, plenty of work, plenty you need to do.

Paul has a second danger of this idle womanhood.

¹³ And besides they learn *to be* idle, wandering about from house to house,

They learn to be idle = they learn to be *unemployed*, to have nothing to do, except wandering from house to house. Give a person no material needs to meet, no money to have to earn, and idleness is learned, and with it this chronic social hopping.

The second danger of this life is it creates gadabouts. That's probably a word you haven't heard at all or in a long time. A gadabout is a person who just flits about in one social engagement after another, a social roamer and wanderer, the drifter. Nothing productive to do, just *kuier hier en kuier daar*, visit, tea, coffee, visit, nails, visit, hair, visit, gym, visit, playdate, visit. Nothing is being done, no one is being taught, disciplined, invested in, nothing is being made, no money is being generated, just idle frippery.

Further, ... and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not.

The third danger Along with being a gadabout comes *gossip and being a busybody*. The words for gossip means a babbler, someone who just opens her mouth and babbles. She doesn't stop talking. She can talk non-stop and endlessly about nothing, like a running commentary on the passing of time itself. She thinks its wholesome and friendly to always be talking, but then she obviously hasn't learnt Proverbs 10:19: ¹⁹ In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, But he who restrains his lips *is* wise.

²⁷ He who has knowledge spares his words, *And* a man of understanding is of a calm spirit. ²⁸ Even a

fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; *When* he shuts his lips, *he is considered* perceptive. (Proverbs 17:27-28)

²³ Whoever guards his mouth and tongue Keeps his soul from troubles. (Proverbs 21:23)

³⁶ But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. ³⁷ For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” (Matthew 12:36–37)

But you can't be a social gadabout and not end up being a babbler. The two go together. And with that, Paul adds the words “busybodies”. The word means to be meddlesome in other's affairs, overly curious about what doesn't concern you, too interested in other people's business. Now put together someone who is just babbling, add to it undue curiosity of other people's business, and what do you have? A gossip, a tattler, a person who spreads scandal and rumours and as Paul puts it, “things they ought not”.

So Paul helps Timothy imagine a scene. Picture a church with young women who now have a stream of income and don't have to worry about work. There they are during the week, lazily prancing from one house to another, just babbling the latest gossip, becoming scandal-mongers, starting and spreading rumours, doing nothing productive.

And some of them, Paul says, have already turned aside after Satan. Some of them were never really believers, and the free time and free money pushed them over the edge to deny the faith and marry a pagan.

Well, instead of encouraging idle womanhood, Paul wants Timothy to foster ideal womanhood. What does that look like?

III. The Duties of Ideal Womanhood

¹⁴ Therefore I desire that *the* younger *widows* marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully.

Now if your first response is to react negatively to Paul's statement, then ask yourself, is my negative reaction because of something I got from Scripture, or from something I got from the world? Who is it that is speaking against women marrying, bearing children and managing the home? Is it God in His Word? The Lord who designed us? No. It's Amazon, and Netflix, and Showmax, and Hollywood, and Cosmopolitan, and Vogue and Vanity Fair.

If God said it, and everything God does and makes is good, then let's see what is good here.

Paul's first instruction is that the young widows remarry. Of course, that's not always something any woman, widowed or not, can control. But it is something she can be open to. She can place herself in situations where she is likely to be noticed by a godly man. She can make herself known to people who know people – and make it known this is something she desires. Unless she has a conviction against it, she can use the Internet, alongside godly counsel, to at least make connections, make some introductions, and then allow good counsel from others.

It is not that a woman who does not marry is incomplete. It's simply that many, if not most, women do find their fulfillment within family, within building a home. Satan's parody of this is the woman who mimics the immorality and promiscuity of the men her age, as a supposed statement of her independence. But what she finds is her sense of shame grows, her sense of insecurity deepens, and her desire to be loved by one faithful man has not lessened at all.

The second ideal is that she bear children. If the younger widow has children of her own, she may yet be able to bear more, or if not, she will continue to care for those she has with her new husband. As we saw earlier in this epistle, in 2:15, the woman is saved from the stigma of the Fall by her investment in children. She overturns the sin of Eve by being the instructor and nurturer of children in the direction of Christ.

Now there can be some very rare vocations that call for childlessness: a couple who decide to work permanently in a warzone. But, barring being physically unable, it is the norm for a couple to seek to have children. To avoid that altogether is to avoid one of the most important callings in life, which provides meaning, drives away boredom and depression, and gives couples a unified sense of high calling. I have seen enough couples with problems now to say that there is a real connection between deliberately chosen childlessness and marital conflict, and deepening depression. Without that purpose, it is difficult for most couples to sustain a companionship with a sense of higher purpose. Too often it devolves into materialism, petty disagreements, and boredom. Normally, the young wife, and the young widow is ready for, and desires to bear children. She who pours herself into her children is entering into the fulfilling state that Paul envisions here.

The third ideal is that she manages the house. This is one word in the Greek. It is a compound of two words *oikos*, which means house or home, and despot, which means ruler, the ancestor of our English word despot, which means absolute ruler. The point is, the wife and mother is the manager and overseer of all things domestic. Her husband is the head of the household, leading her and providing the direction, the guidance, the supervision. But she is the manager who implements it all and sees to all things domestic. What everyone is eating, their clothing, the home itself and its cleanliness and beauty and warmth. She looks to what everyone is doing, and watching on TV or their laptops or phones, she sees to what friends come over and keeps an ear present to hear what the children are talking about. She looks to the medical needs, and the health, and under her husband, the education of the children. If you want a fuller list, read Proverbs 31 and you will see all the ways she manages the home.²⁷ She watches over the ways of her household, And does not eat the bread of idleness. (Proverbs 31:27)

Once a young pastor in the south of England was burdened by how often he was called out of the home, and by how his attention was pulled away from his large family and many children. As he headed out one day, he heard a voice, a voice praying. It was the voice of his wife. As he listened, he heard her pray for the children by name. When she came to one name, Charles, she said, "Lord, he has a daring spirit; whether for good or for evil, make it Thine own." The pastor went away comforted, saying to himself, "It is all right; I can go and serve the Lord; it is right with the children". The Charles for whom that prayer was offered was Charles Spurgeon and his mother was a Christian worker. She watched over the ways of her household.

Now if she gives herself to these three, the result will be that she will give no opportunity for the adversary, the Devil, to accuse, to speak reproachfully. Instead of there being ammunition for Satan to say, "such are the Christian women, look at these daughters of Eve, like mother, like daughter, still off on her own, idle and easy to prey on, still suspicious of God's Word, still chafing under authority, still striking out for some other life, and trying to get her husband to play along". No, when she is industrious, sacrificial, given to marriage and family, Satan hates her, because she is everything God honours, and nothing that Satan can use or accuse.

Now here is a call not only for the case of widows, but for all to avoid the dangers of being idle.

You can see the great dangers of idle womanhood. Now the dangers of idle manhood are also

massive and equally problematic. Idle manhood is not less problematic, it is just different. When men are idle they tend to become destructive: to their own bodies in drink and drugs; they tend to become socially destructive by gathering in groups or gangs, they turn to crime, vandalism, sheer thuggery. A population of able-bodied and idle men is a hotbed of crime and violence, just look around you.

Idle womanhood is not usually destructive to people and property; it is usually socially destructive: gossip, scandal, divisions, time and money wastage. So there is a stark warning here about idleness. Whether you are a housewife, or a stay-at-home mother, or a retired woman, if you have enough money to live off, you have to refuse and reject these worldly and sinful forms of female idleness. You have to see that the Bible's ideal of a stay-at-home mom is not a social butterfly, not someone who has hired someone to do all her work so she has nothing to do except pamper her appearance and pet her children from time to time. The godly woman is a worker, like her husband, from sun-up to sun-down. She is industrious, diligent, toiling in her realm to bring glory to God. No woman should exploit her husband's largesse to become the idle woman, and no husband should let it happen on his watch.

People imagine that if they just struck it rich, that then they could finally focus on the Lord. But this passage is an insight into what our hearts would do if we had no work to do, no pressing needs and plenty of time. We actually get into the worst trouble when we have the least to do, when we are bored and idle. Bottom line: work is a gift from God. Having to toil for your daily bread is a restraint on your sin nature that you should gladly receive. The need to work for a living, outside the home or in the home, whether providing for the home or within the home is what drives out many temptations that would otherwise surface.

When you pray, "Lead us not into temptation", the way God often answers is that is to make sure you have plenty to do, plenty of needs to meet, plenty of honest work. So then, like the people in Nehemiah, let us have mind to work, and work while it is day, redeeming the time.