

The Office of Widows

The office of widows receives special attention in the First Letter to Timothy (5:3–16). The idea behind this vocation was that widows who had no family members to care for them could be supported financially by the church while devoting themselves to prayer and good works. But two problems seem to have arisen:

- Some church members were taking advantage of the program and abdicating their personal responsibility to care for family members (1 Tim. 5:4, 8).
- Some younger widows apparently were taken into the program and then they dropped out, deciding to remarry.

Thus Timothy is told to limit enrollment in the program to those who are “real widows”—that is, those who have been “left alone” with no one to care for them (1 Tim. 5:1, 3, 5, 16). He is also to limit enrollment to widows over sixty years of age and to women who have demonstrated a capacity for the life of prayer and good works that are expected of those in the program.

For more on this intriguing office, see Bonnie Bowman Thurston, *The Widows: A Women's Ministry in the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989).