



1 Timothy 5:1-16

Home Economics¹

Advent 4 – December 8, 2016 (am)

Lord God, help us turn our hearts to you and hear what you will speak, for you speak peace and goodness and life to us your people through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

If you're a fan of knowing where we are headed in a sermon from the outset, then you're in luck this Sunday morning! Here's the outline for our time together. I want, first, to take a few moments to identify the "what" of this passage. That is, I want briefly to summarize the basic point of emphasis, the clear and most immediate concern, which Paul is addressing in today's text, 1 Tim 5:1–16. After pointing out the "what" of the passage, we'll move on, second, to the "why" of Paul's words. Why does Paul say what he says here? What assumptions lead him to say what he says? Naming and unpacking the assumptions which Paul is operating with, and which lead him to say what he says here, will prepare us to get a sense of the "wherefore" of the text, which is where we'll spend most of our time. "Wherefore" is simply an archaic synonym for "therefore." *Since* Paul says what he says and assumes what he assumes, *therefore* we should understand our identity and live our lives in certain ways in and as the church of God. That is, there are certain *implications* for us today that arise from what Paul says about the church and presupposes about its God here in 1 Tim 5. We'll want to consider a couple of those third and finally this morning. So that's the plan: the what, the why, and the wherefore.

Let's get started, first, with the "what." What, in a nutshell, is Paul saying to the Christians in Ephesus? Well, the main topic is impossible to miss: Paul is talking about widows in the church. Widows appear over and over again in these verses, being explicitly mentioned eight times (Paul only mentions "widows" one other time in all his other letters² s²).

But what about widows does Paul say specifically? Well, he identifies three main categories of widows, and the simplest way to see this is by looking at what he says in the concluding verses of the passage. Paul says in v. 14, "I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households." That's one category of widows in the church at Ephesus— those who are "younger" and still of marriageable age. A second category of widows is referred to in the first half of v. 16, where Paul speaks of "any believing woman [whol] has relatives who are widows."

There are some widows who have adult relatives in the church. That's a second category of widows that Paul mentions. The third category of widows is those who are, in Paul's language, "truly widows" or "widows indeed," which Paul mentions in the last sentence of v. 16. These are widows who are older and who have no adult children or grandchildren in the church. What Paul is doing in this morning's passage, a summary of which appears in vv. 14–16, is identifying and setting out expectations for three categories of widows: younger widows of marriageable age; older widows who have adult children or grandchildren in the church; and older widows who are without any adult family in the church, whom Paul calls "widows indeed" or those who are "truly widows."

And the reason Paul spends time distinguishing categories of widows is because he wants the church as a whole to seek strategically to care for those in the last category, those who are "truly widows." Such care involves financial support specifically, but also more generally it includes relational support and concern. He wants a list to be made of such ones, which he speaks of in v. 9, so that none might slip through the cracks. He wants the church to feel the weight of responsibility for "honoring" such widows as he says in v. 3. He wants widows of the other two categories—younger widows and widows with adult children or grandchildren in the body—not to be enrolled in such a list, (1) because there are other avenues for their care which Paul notes in these verses, and (2) "so that," it says at the end of v. 16, the church may be freed to "care for those who are really widows."

That's the basic and pretty clear point of the passage, Paul's main concern and call boiled down to a single statement: "honor," take care of, provide financial and material and relational support for those among you who are "truly widows." There are, of course, several details making up the basic point which present a number of interpretive questions and challenges. But I don't want to get bogged down in sifting through all the details this morning. I want simply to press upon our minds and hearts what Paul's overarching call is—to care for those in the church who are "truly widows." That's the "what" of this passage in a nutshell.³

We can turn now to the "why" of the passage. Why is Paul concerned about this? More specifically, I want to ask, What driving assumptions or presuppositions are at work leading Paul to spend so much time on the matter here in ch. 5? It's interesting to note that this passage is one of the longest, most detail-oriented in the whole letter. Paul spends more time talking about the care of widows than he does, for example, on the qualifications for elders in ch. 3.⁴ Why so much time on *this* matter? Why is it so important to him?

The “why” of what is said is often just as important as what is actually said, and in certain respects, understanding the “why” is crucial for understanding the “what” in the first place. Think, for example, of the cry, “Don’t touch that stovetop!” *Why* someone would cry that is as important as the cry itself. If I’m speaking to my two-year-old daughter who is about to place her hand on a hot stove, the words have the meaning and significance of a firm, loving, concern-filled caution. If I’m a camper returning from a hike and seeing a suspicious-looking fellow fiddling with my camp-stove, “Don’t touch that stovetop!” has the meaning and significance of an alarm and a deterrent and an accusation. Or if I’m at the Thanksgiving table surrounded by hungry people, “Don’t touch that Stove Top!” can be a calling of dibs on the last of the stuffing and gravy. Knowing the “why” of what is said, the assumptions and presuppositions at work in communication, knowing the story in which what is said makes sense, and being able to discern how a writer or speaker is drawing on such things in a given context, is often crucial for understanding “what” is being said in the first place.⁵

Why, then, does Paul say all this about caring for those who are “truly widows”? What assumptions about God and church and reality lead him to spend so much time on the matter? Of the many ways to begin answering that question,⁶ one of the more helpful is to consider the opening statements of this section. Interestingly, this chapter, which is clearly about the *church’s* care for *widows*, begins with exhortations to *Timothy* about how he relates with *different kinds of people*. In vv. 1–2, Paul tells Timothy to treat older men as he would his father,⁷ younger men as brothers, older women as his mothers, younger women as sisters. This is how Paul introduces his call to the church as a whole to care for widows. Apparently, Paul believes that highlighting the nature of Timothy’s relationships with other Christians will help to set the proper frame for understanding the call to the whole church to care for widows.

And clearly, Paul wants Timothy to understand the nature of his relationships with others in the body of Christ in a certain way, or within a certain metaphorical field. Timothy’s relationships with others in the church are like *kinship* relationships, *family* relationships. Paul tells Timothy to relate to other Christians as he would with his own mother and father and sisters and brothers. Indeed, that’s what Christians are for each other, a kind of family. That’s what the new covenant community, what the church, is.

From Jesus’ own teaching to the end of the New Testament, this is the consistent portrayal of the identity of the body of Christ. What we are in Christ and what Christ’s new covenant has made us⁸ is the family of God, new covenant brothers and sisters to one another, mothers and fathers and children and kin in the Lord. When God the Father through Christ our Lord reconciles

us to himself and adopts us as his children, in that *very same work of reconciliation* he is also reconciling us to one another as children of the same Father, as brothers and sisters, as family. The two are inseparable; rightness with God assumes relationship to and family responsibility toward and covenantal life with one another in the church.

As Paul has already expressed it in the pivotal middle passage in this letter to Timothy, 1 Tim 3:15, we are in Christ the "household of God."⁹ And Paul writes this letter to Timothy so that the church might, it says there in 3:15, "know how [we] ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God." That is to say, Paul writes this letter so that we might know how to manage the household well, so that we might know what goes into a healthy household economy. This letter to Timothy is ultimately a kind of guidebook for healthy home economics—how to live with and care for and support and seek the well-being and flourishing of the household of God, the family of God which we are.

And we are now in a position to see why Paul spends so much time addressing the care of widows and especially the care of those who are "truly widows" in the church. Paul's key assumption is that they are our family; they are our "mothers." That's why he opens with words about Timothy's *family*-like relationships with fellow Christians in the church, because what we are in the body of Christ is the family of God.¹⁰ We have kinship ties and family responsibilities toward one another. We have a kinship relationship with *widows* in our midst, and we have a familial responsibility toward them. In fact, Paul uses very biblical language to speak of our responsibility toward them. His opening word about widows in v. 3 is "honor": "*Honor* widows who are truly widows." I think he has carefully chosen this word as a way of recalling God's own law to talk about our responsibility. The Fifth Commandment is, "*Honor* your father and mother." Part of what that commandment is almost certainly calling for is treating our parents with dignity and respect and providing care for them into their old age.¹¹ Paul is alluding to that commandment in order to say that if that is our responsibility toward our biological parents, how much more so must we "honor" our mothers in the family of God!

So in 1 Tim 5, Paul is setting forth a strategy so that the household economy of the church at Ephesus might be for the good of all, so that no family member would slip through the cracks, so that everyone in the family might be remembered and welcomed to and participate in the family's feasting and fellowship. In particular, he is laying out guidelines for helping the family of God in Ephesus remember and care for some of those in their midst who were most vulnerable and susceptible to being forgotten—namely, widows. Sadly, these, our mothers in the family of

God, are the ones most often on the margins and forgotten. Paul is pleading, "How can you forget your mothers? May it never be!"

Having touched briefly upon the "what" and the "why," let's now shift to the "wherefore" of what Paul and God through him has said in 1 Tim 5, which is where we'll spend the remainder of our time. We need to unpack some of the implications of this text for us this morning, some ways in which it might be fitting and needful to respond to the word of Paul and of God here in 1 Tim 5.¹² We only have time to explore two suggestions in a responsible manner—one that is quite explicit in the text, and one that is, I believe, implicit here.¹³

First, and most obviously, the kind of response to which God is calling us in 1 Tim 5 is to attend with diligence and wisdom and institutional strategy to the needs of widows among us. Let us honor the widows in the body. Now that doesn't mean *merely* women whose husbands have died. The "widows" in the Ephesian church who were to be enrolled to receive material support were "widows indeed," not widows with adult children or grandchildren, or young widows who may still marry. It's not that the church at Ephesus didn't need to care about these other categories of widows in the body; it's not as if they were not also mothers and sisters in the Lord. It's because they had opportunities and provisions available to them that those who were "truly widows" *did not have*. Paul is calling the church to care for all its widows through appropriate, available means, but to seek with institutional wisdom and strategy to make sure that those who are "truly widows" in the body do not languish forgotten and alone.

Those who are "truly widows" are part of a special category of people whom God is especially concerned about. Widows, together with orphans, appear throughout Scripture as a kind of theological shorthand for those in society who are most on the margins—and thus most easily forgotten. They were the most defenseless, the most resourceless, those most at the mercy of others socially and materially—and thus those most vulnerable and easy to take advantage of. But God is the God of the helpless and vulnerable and forgotten. So God protects the orphan and widow.¹⁴ So Paul commands the church to care for and honor and pursue especially not just widows in general, but "widows indeed," those who have no other practical helps and supports, those who are de facto outsiders, those who have no other recourse but to "set [their] hope on God," as Paul says in v. 5. This is a call to pay attention to the marginalized among us, the outcast, the defenseless, those especially vulnerable to neglect or abuse, those who have little or none of the common resources that the majority enjoy and take for granted.

And with this in view, I think it is in keeping with Paul's concern in our passage and the theological thrust of Scripture for us here today to receive this call to the Ephesian church to "honor widows" as a more general call for us to honor the family members in this church family who are most susceptible to neglect and isolation, those who are most vulnerable to the sufferings of life and the hardships brought on by sin and disorder. This certainly will include actual widows here at Grace. But it will also include our brothers and sisters in Christ who are in nursing homes, or who are shut-ins, whom we too easily forget about. And brothers and sisters who suffer from mental and physical impairments, who tend to live on the outskirts of body life. And brothers and sisters who float on the margins of social life, those whom many of us, for any number of reasons—none of which are good, try to avoid more often than not. It includes children from broken homes, with no resources to change their situation. It includes people in the body caught in abusive relationships who feel they have nowhere to turn, no one to trust. It includes those among us with unbelieving spouses and children and parents and siblings, who do not experience the goodness and wonder of delighting in the grace of God with their family and are weighed down with a sense of isolation and loneliness.

There are always too many people in the church—in this church, Grace Church—who are easy for the majority of us to forget; who too frequently get left on the sidelines of body life; who are languishing and have oh-so-few people extending a hand of help and a heart of concern. But they are our family! Our brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers and kids! How can we forget them? That's the plea of this passage. God is calling us through 1 Tim 5 to pay attention to such as these in our midst, to notice them, to visit them, to care for their needs, to set up strategies and systems as a body so that they might be protected and nourished and loved. What kinds of strategies and systems? Something like our Benevolence Fund is a good place to start. We can contribute to this fund which is precisely for meeting the financial needs of those among us who don't have other resources to turn to. Differently, we can dream up ways, and then act on plans, to make our gatherings more accessible to those who might otherwise be left on the margins of life and goodness in the family of God. We can actively plan and pursue the visitation of shut-ins and our mothers and fathers in nursing homes. We can regularly and systematically pray through the photo directory for each person in the body *by name*, if for no other reason than as a way to keep every person, every family member, before us, to help us notice who is actually here as our brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers and children. And perhaps we might actually say "Hi" to them and address them by name the next time we see them.

There are dozens of ways in which we can, individually and corporately, “honor” those who are “truly widows” in our midst, dozens of ways in which we can act rightly on the impulse that Paul is seeking to unleash on the church at Ephesus and that God through Paul is seeking to unleash on us. It is my hope and prayer that God would help us, by the power and guidance of his Spirit and for the glory of his Son Jesus, to dream up still further wise and wonderful ways to “honor” those who are “truly widows” in our midst and would empower us to act on those dreams and plans for the good of our true family in the Lord. That’s the first fitting response to 1 Tim 5, and it’s easy to identify from the text. The second fitting response I want to suggest is much more obscure; the call to it is much more implicit in the text. But here goes. I believe we can discern in this text a call to flee from idolatry. I grant that if such a call is here, it is very implicit, indeed. But I think it’s here. And we can discern it by pressing upon the connection between the family of God which is the church and the biological families into which we are born and for which we are responsible.

According to Paul, there are certain responsibilities we have toward one another in the church. And to help us rightly understand those responsibilities, Paul sets up an analogy with the responsibilities we all assume we necessarily have toward our biological or immediate families. Behave with older men in the church *as you would with your father*, and to younger women as sisters, and to widows as you would with your widowed mother. The almost innate sense we have that we should love and care for our biological family is the model Paul uses to call us to love and care for fellow people in the church. That’s the logic of this passage, the analogy Paul is making. And in order for the logic and analogy to work, then there must be some truthful correspondence between our biological families and our covenantal family. Does that make sense so far? Are you tracking?

But then comes the most crucial question: If there is some truthful correspondence between biological families and the covenantal family which is the church of God, why is that so? Or better, *who* put such a correspondence into the fabric of reality? Well, of course, *God* did. God is the one who thought up “family” in the first place; he’s the one who created “family” as very good. And I believe that part of the reason family is very good—in fact, the *root* reason why it is very good—is because it exists as a pointer to and a preparer for what God purposed to do and is doing in Christ for his people. That is, the *meaning* of family. We don’t know what family truly is until we understand what God created it for. And pointing to, and preparing us to live into, the reality which is the church is right at the heart of why God created family.

It is much the same with marriage, which most of us are more familiar with in this respect. Marriage, Paul says quite clearly in Eph 5, was established by God in Genesis in order to help us understand and take up our part in the mystery which is Christ's covenant union with his bride, the church. The meaning of marriage is bound up with God's purpose for it to be a sign and a pointer to the life and love of Christ and his church. That's the *meaning* of marriage. We don't understand what marriage is, we don't live into the full goodness and glory of marriage, without exulting in and entering into the purpose of the Creator in giving it.

So it is with family. We don't understand the true meaning of family, and we don't live into the full goodness and glory of it, if we ignore or live against the purposes of the Creator in giving it. Yet that's precisely what we often try to do with family. And here is where the call to flee idolatry comes in. Idolatry is wrongly ordered worship. Idolatry is setting what is penultimate up as ultimate, as the thing to be worshiped and served by everything else. Idolatry is taking the gifts of God which were meant to lead us back to the Giver and his grand story as our supreme joy and true meaning, and stalling our joy and delight on the gifts, demanding that they have the meaning that *we* desire them to have, not the meaning given to them by their Creator. Family is one of the most common idols. It is something we want on our own terms. It is something we pursue in our own self-defined ways. It is something that we make everything else serve—other people are tools to be wielded so that my family is comfortable; church is viewed as a handy (and optional) aid for the betterment of my nuclear family; God exists for the protection of my family or the provision of the family I've always wanted, and I will only "love" God if he makes good on this *my right*. To be sure, family is one of the greatest of God's gifts. But that is so because it one of the clearest pointers to what is ultimate. It is meant, in the wisdom and goodness of God, to prepare us for life with God and as his people, as covenant family. Yet we take what is penultimate and make it ultimate.

It's not just with family. I focus on family simply because Paul is speaking directly about it in our passage. But we do the same with things like wealth and romance and comfort and success and self-discovery and food and friends and political freedoms and attention. We take what is penultimate and set it up as ultimate; we ignorantly, ungratefully take the gifts of God from under the tree of heaven and use them in ways that they were never meant to be used.

And as we idolize comfort or privacy or money or biological family, we increasingly see the call of God on our lives, for example, to care for those in need in the church as a *threat* to the service of our idols. God calls us in 1 Tim 5 to "honor" those who are "truly widows" in our body, yet we say things to ourselves like, "It's too awkward." Or, "I never know what to say, so I'll just avoid

them." Or, "It's so draining to spend time with them; all they do is complain." Or, "There's so many more important things I could be doing!" Or, "Why should I give my hard-earned money to someone who doesn't know how to manage their own life." Or, "They're not *my* responsibility; *my* responsibility is to my own family." And on and on and on; we give excuses to God that the life he calls us to is less than the good life we really need.¹⁵ At least, if you're anything like me, you throw up such excuses to God, to yourself, to others.

Honestly caring for others in the family of God is hard, in part because it puts the idols we want to serve at risk. And one of the things that Paul is doing here in 1 Timothy is setting things back in order by helping us see that God gives us family to prepare us for the new life in Christ which is beginning in the church. We can discern in this an implicit call to flee idolatry so that wonderful and good but penultimate realities might serve their purpose of pointing to and preparing for and being enjoyed under ultimate realities. Let us flee idolatry.

This is, in fact, the only wise choice before us. As the saying goes, if you try to go against the grain of reality, eventually you will get a splinter.¹⁶ To live contrary to the Creator's design and intentions will always, in the end, be more turbulent and sad and broken than submitting willingly, even gladly, to design and intention.

I know a man who grew up in that *wonderful* land we call South Korea. He tells a story about when he first moved from the US to South Korea with his family as a child. His mother wanted to get to know her neighbors, so she decided to host a party for the neighborhood in their apartment. She was new to the place and culture, a Westerner in a very different Eastern world, but she would give it her best go. She got everything ready, made tasty hors d'oeuvres and a lovely meal, decorated the apartment, sent invitations, and sought to make the party as welcoming and inviting as she could. But right before the guests were to arrive, she realized that she could not locate her punch bowl. They still hadn't fully unpacked, and the bowl was nowhere to be found. Rather than panic, she did what all industrialized citizens do: she bought what she needed, going to the corner store, picking up the first thing she could find.

The party began; many neighbors showed up; but to her surprise and chagrin, no one drank the punch. Not a single guest touched it. For her, it put a damper on the whole party. What did she do wrong? Only later did a kind neighbor explain to her that the "bowl" she was serving the punch in was actually a chamber pot. This sincere, well-intentioned woman was using something contrary to the intentions of its maker. And the point of the story is this: when you go

against the intentions and purposes and meanings of the Maker, the party will eventually be ruined. Flee idolatry.

And don't miss the good news in the call to flee from idolatry. We want to flee idolatry because we don't want to spoil the party. The good news is that we were made for a party—or better, we were made for true celebration and joy, and in Christ the doors to that celebration and joy have been thrown open wide! There is goodness to be enjoyed when we enter into the Creator's purposes. There is goodness and peace and rest and joy to be had in the call of the Creator to live as though this body of Christ were a family, brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers and sons and daughters in the Lord. Indeed, that *is* what we are. Caring for one another as covenant family isn't a *threat* to our individual well-being and flourishing; it's part of the definition of our well-being and flourishing because it fulfills our Creator's intentions and design. It's what goes into the "peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way" from 1 Tim 2,¹⁷ which God longs for the church to enjoy and which turns the attention of the chaotic nations of the world to true life and peace, and to the source of it: the wise and good and loving Creator God and his perfect designs and intentions for his creation.

If you feel like your life lacks joy and anything worth celebrating, perhaps it is because you are trying to live your life on your own unwise terms. If gratitude and peace and hope are conspicuously absent from your life, maybe it's because you are seeking to live your life contrary to the designs and purposes and intentions of your Maker. Maybe it is because you are trying to take good but penultimate gifts and set them up as ultimate gods to worship and serve. False gods will always disappoint. We weren't meant to serve them, and we weren't meant for the chaos that follows in the wake of serving them. We were meant for order and goodness and peace and gratitude and joy and celebration. Flee from idolatry. Enter into the rest of God through Christ and submit to his way, his way of peace and joy, a way that will end in the greatest of celebrations. And let us rejoice with wonder and gratitude that even now, we get little gracious foretastes of that celebration and joy and peace, such as the bread and the cup that we are about to share.

So God, our heavenly Father, you who have given to us the glorious gospel of our risen Savior and Maker, we pray that you would open our hearts to receive with joy the good news here this morning; by the power of your Spirit, grant that we may experience the newness of life held out to us as your covenant family; help us to gratefully share it with and manifest it to others; and empower us ever to give glory to you, by whose grace alone we are what we are, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

NOTES:

1 With apologies to Wendell Berry (and to my 11th grade home economics teacher).

2 The other mention in the Pauline corpus is 1 Cor 7:8

3 Virtually everyone reading this text can agree on that basic point of concern which ties this passage together. However, those who see in the passage the rhetoric of patriarchy that we must deconstruct so as to discover what was really going on in Ephesus (i.e., a proto-feminist movement that Paul sought to squelch) would not be a part of the majority agreeing on the basic gist of these paragraphs. For interaction with and helpful responses to this minority line of interpretation, see Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, AB 35A (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 270–72.

4 As Johnson notes, "The discussion of widows in 5:3–16 is extended and far more complex than any other of Paul's instructions in this letter" (*ibid.*, 269).

5 Coming at things from a different angle, the "what" of what is spoken/written can be worked on inside and out—we can know the dictionary definition of each word and understand the syntax perfectly. We can do extensive word studies and historical background studies of the speaker. We can understand the historical context out of which every confusing detail in a passage is addressed (and there are many such confusing details in our passage this morning!). But if that's all we have, without also knowing the kind of presuppositions and assumptions the speaker is making and drawing upon about the context, about the identity of who is being addressed, and so on, we have at best a superficial understanding of the statement and at worst a misunderstanding. We might have answers to interesting questions, but they are not the questions the person/ text is seeking to answer.

6 One of the more obvious contextually specific factors is that apparently in Ephesus the "widows indeed" were being left uncared for, perhaps in part owing to the diversion of resources to those who had other means of care and support available to them (e.g., younger widows, widows with believing family in the church). I want to take a more discourse-theological route toward answering the "why"—theological, in that I want to see how Paul's directives flow from his ecclesiology; and discourse, in that I want to explain why Paul introduces his exhortations about widow-care with words to Timothy about his relations with other believers.

7 In itself, *πρεσβύτερος* here is ambiguous and might refer to older men or to those holding the office of elder (which might be expected given the use of the closely related *πρεσβυτέριον* just a few verses earlier in 4:14; see Johnson, *Timothy*, 259–60). For a good defense of taking the term to refer to older men, see William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC 46 (Nashville: Nelson, 2000), 270.

8 For a robust argument that kinship is at the heart of biblical covenantal establishments (i.e., kinship is what a covenant establishes), see Scott W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God's Saving Promises* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

9 Cf. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 268–69.

10 Mounce highlights the connection between what precedes and this section: Timothy is to be an example (4:12) and his example begins in his relations with others in the community (5:1ff.); see *ibid.*, 268.

11 That this is so is evident in the fact that the command was addressed primarily to the adult generation at Sinai, and then again to the adult generation about to enter the wilderness (on Deut 5:16, see J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, AOTC 5 [Leicester: Apollos/Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002], 128–29; cf.

Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy, OTL* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 58). This is how the command is apparently interpreted later in Scripture (see Prov 23:22; Matt 15:4–6; Eph 6:2). Cf. Johnson, Timothy, 260–61. For Johnson, since the context in 1 Tim 5 is clearly about financial support, therefore it is “demanded” that τῖμα in 5:3 be translated “provide financial support.” But this obscures the allusion to the Decalogue, and is unnecessary in any case since Johnson himself admits that even the Fifth Commandment entails financial support of parents in old age (see *ibid.*).

12 It’s an important matter to devote time to because 1 Tim 5:1–16 is not the kind of text that is terribly easy for us to slap onto contemporary life and apply in one-to-one ways, if for no other reason than that our context, and the everyday experience and situation of widows today, is quite different from the context and experience of the widows at ancient Ephesus to which Paul writes. For example, literal widows in our context and society do not face quite the same destitution and vulnerability as widows in ancient Ephesus faced (there are, e.g., wage-earning opportunities that were not available to older generations in ancient times, welfare systems, etc.); similarly, young widows today need not look to marriage as one of the only viable options for vocation and sustenance as they had to in ancient Ephesus (the ancient Ephesian socio-cultural context helps [a bit] to explain Paul’s instructions concerning younger widows). Our context is different from that of ancient Ephesus, so it might not be in accordance with wisdom simply to wrest Paul’s particular directives to that ancient church as a one-size-fits-all strategy for all churches everywhere and to set up enrollment lists for the care of “widows indeed” at Grace Church. In fact, there is reason to believe that Paul himself gives these instructions in 1 Tim 5 not as a universal law for all churches in all places and times, but as a particular word of wisdom addressed specifically to Ephesus (note the contrast between 1 Tim 5:14 and 1 Cor 7:8 [cf. also vv. 7, 25ff.]). So how we respond to this particular word to the church in Ephesus requires some theological thinking on our part. Or to say it differently, 1 Tim 5 requires that we do the very thing Paul himself is doing in 1 Tim 5—that is, responding in Scripture-saturated, Spirit-guided wisdom to real and present needs that are before us.

13 Other areas that this text touches upon and accomplishes for us include (1) filling out a responsible ecclesiology, (2) calling us to discernment, (3) warning us of the dangers of idleness and luxury. On the exemplification of and need for wisdom/discernment, see esp. Johnson, Timothy, 272–76, whose discussion appears under the heading “The Passage as a Call to Discernment.”

14 More generally, widows and orphans (and also aliens) are the representative examples of the larger category of the “poor” in Scripture, whose material existence and historical experience posture them continually in the mode of neediness and reliance and desperation, so that their lived lives are oriented continually in the same orientation as that of faith (see further Richard Bauckham, *James: Wisdom of James, Disciple of Jesus the Sage, New Testament Readings* [London: Routledge, 1999], 188–96). This helps to explain why widows (and the “poor” more generally) are representative throughout Scripture of the righteous. It also helps explain why the motif of care for orphans and widows runs throughout the Scriptures, for it is precisely such as these that God cares for and whom his people should extend care to.

15 A problem in the opposite direction arises when we act, in a manner, on the call to care for those in our midst who are in need, but we do so begrudgingly. Or worse yet, we do so condescendingly, with a Messiah-complex that says, “O how much good I am doing for poor old so-and-so! They sure better appreciate how much good I am doing them!” Here the realization of our identity as family is crucial—the proper frame in which to understand the care we extend to others in the body of Christ is not from the self-sufficient to the needy, not from benefactors to beneficiaries, not from counselors to counselees, but from brothers and sisters to mothers and fathers to daughters and so forth. Indeed, the language of “helping those in need,” though needful, can get us into trouble, for what Paul is calling for is less the helpers helping the helpless who depend utterly on the helpers but for the family to be mutually dependent, which in fact we are and which we would recognize if we had our right wits about us (see esp. 2 Cor 8:13–15!). For Paul and the God who inspired his writing, it is familial, covenantal

responsibility not contractual responsibility that we are fulfilling in the body of Christ.

16 The earliest use of the saying that I can find is that of Herbert H. Farmer, "The Love of God," in *God and Men* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1947).

17 The notion of creational order is, I believe, something like the theological substructure of this letter to Timothy. All of Paul's instructions flow from an understanding of creational order and are aimed at its being lived into in the church at Ephesus. The "peaceful and quiet life" that the church seeks (2:2) is (a beginning manifestation of) the life of shalom that the creation was intended to enjoy. God's work and intention in the creation of Adam and Eve informs Paul's expectations for male and female roles in corporate worship (2:13–15). In our own passage, it is, I believe, significant that Paul alludes to one of the only two commandments in the Decalogue which are stated as positive prescriptions rather than prohibitions (the other is the Fourth Commandment about the Sabbath). I think the positive form of these two commandments is an indication that at these points the Decalogue is tapping expressly into God's positive, creational purposes for his people (this is easy to discern with respect to the Sabbath commandment; the promise of long life in the "land" which is attached to the command to honor parents is an important signal to creational order and intention in the Fifth Commandment). If I am right about the larger aim of the letter, then it is doubly unsurprising that Paul would allude to the Fifth Commandment in 5:3.

In other words, what Paul is after is the church living into its identity and destiny: being the beginning place where every good thing created by God is "sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer," esp. gratitude (4:4–5). Paul is after the creational order and creational goodness being realized in the church. Better, Paul is after the creational order and goodness coming to fulfillment in new creational order and new creational life in the church. The creational order of "family" points to, and comes to realization in, the new covenant family being gathered around God. In the overlap of the ages, both orders abide, but that the new order has arrived in incipient ways is the crucial assumption at work in Paul's instructions to Timothy (which are instructions about/for the church).

As one further side note, if Paul is assuming in 1 Timothy that the new creational age is breaking in and that new creational (true creational and cultural) order is now realizable and being realized in incipient ways in the church, then this may help to explain the apparently parenthetical and strange comment Paul makes to Timothy about drinking wine for what ails him (5:23). Wine is unmistakably a crucial symbol of the eschatological, new creational age (of numerous texts to point to, simply noting Isa 25:6; Joel 3:18; and esp. Amos 9:13–15 is sufficient to make the point; for further creative and thought-provoking reflections on the eschatological nature of wine in Scripture, see Jeffrey J. Meyers, "Concerning Beer and Wine," *Rite Reasons: Studies in Worship* 48–49 [1996]). Furthermore, Paul's use of temporal marker (μηκέτι) suggests that there was once a time for water, but we are "no longer" in that time; a new age has dawned.