THE WIDOWS’ LIST

I Timothy 5:9&10 No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the Lord’s people, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.

Qualifications

I Timothy 5:1-8 Widows without family to care for them.

I Timothy 5:12&13 probably implies a promise to serve the church as they were able and to not remarry.

Over 60

“Faithful to her husband” is the reverse of I Timothy 3:2 “faithful to his wife.” A one-man woman would be the most literal translation.

“Well known for her good deeds, such as:”

“Bringing up children” may refer to her own children or to taking in infants left out to die.

“Showing hospitality” is “if she has lodged strangers” in the NKJV.

“Washing the feet of the Lord’s people” refers to what was normally done for a guest entering your home. It implies a willingness to do an unpleasant task that needed to be done in service to others.

“Helping those in trouble.” Trouble “has reference to sufferings due to the pressure of circumstances, or the antagonism of persons.” It can also mean “to suffer affliction.” (Both quotes from Vines)

“Devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds” seems to be self-explanatory.

The Church Obligations

Provide food: Acts 6:1 “the daily distribution of food.”

Treat them as valuable and give them needed support. I Timothy 5:3 (NASB) Honor widows who are widows indeed.

I Timothy 5:17&18 The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For Scripture says, “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,” and “The worker deserves his wages.”

I Corinthians 6:19d&20a You are not your own; you were bought at a price.

James 1:27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

The church and individual believers should help widows and orphans whether they are on a list or not.

Possible Duties

Visiting women when it would be inappropriate for a man to make a visit.

(Possibly implied in verse 13 and mentioned by early church historians)

Making clothing for those in need: Acts 9:39-41 Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was till with them…He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive.

Teaching younger women: Titus 2:3-5 Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

Early church historical references almost always refer to the ministry of prayer.

Younger Widows

I Timothy 5:11-13 As for younger widows, do not put them on such a list. For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ, they want to marry. Thus they bring judgment on themselves, because they have broken their first pledge. Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also busybodies who talk nonsense, saying things they ought not to.

I Timothy 5:14&15 So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander. Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan.

2 Thessalonians 3:6-8 In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.

2 Thessalonians 3:9-11 We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.” We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle downs and earn the food they eat.

“Turned away to follow Satan” probably refers to marrying an unbeliever.

The Younger Widows Should Marry

I Corinthians 7:2 (NKJV) Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.

What About Divorced Women and Men?

I Corinthians 7:27&28a (NASB) Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you marry, you have not sinned…

Underlying Principles

Christians should work if they are able to provide for themselves and not be dependent on outside help (church, government, etc.) I Thessalonians 4:11&12

The primary source of provision should always be the family. I Timothy 5:3-9

Marriage provides both provision for material needs and reduces the temptation for sexual immorality. (The poverty rate for single mother families in the US is 34%. The poverty rate for married couple families is 6%.)

Things to Think About

As individual Christians and as a church we have an obligation to provide for those in need, especially widows and orphans.

Only widows of good character who are over 60 should be put on a list to receive help on a regular basis.

Younger widows (and divorcees) should be encouraged to remarry but not to make getting married again their primary goal in life.

Social programs that do not encourage long term marriage are counter-productive in the long run. If we are really serious about reducing poverty, we should look at restoring the Biblical view of marriage.