

**A CRITICAL EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF
'ONTOSCHERAS' (1TIMOTHY 5: 3-5, 8):
ITS IMPLICATION FOR THE CHURCH.**

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ABSTRACT

Many studies have been carried out on the responsibility of the church in caring for widows that are in real need but few have focused on Paul's recommendation for the Church regarding those that are widows 'indeed' and how they should be cared for. The number of women becoming widows has been increasing on daily basis due to the deaths of their husbands which are caused by various reasons such as insurgency, ethnic wars, HIV infections, accidents, old age and many others. This paper, therefore, examines critically Paul's teaching on care of real widows in 1 Timothy 5:3-5, 8 in relation to the practice of care of widows in the church. The paper adopts a critical exegetical interpretation drawing resources from secondary sources. The secondary source has to do with both published and unpublished materials from books, journals, commentaries, newspapers, internets, etc. The study recommends that there is need for the Church to follow the recommendations spelt out by St. Paul in 1 Timothy 5:3-5, 8, so that the Church is not over-burdened with so many responsibilities.

Keywords: Exegetical Analysis, Church, *Ontos Cheras*, Implication

Introduction

Several studies have shown that widows undergo several challenges after the death of their husbands within the society and these affect their socio-economic development and spiritual growth in the society. However, despite the church's effort in caring for the need of the widows, there are still much to be accomplished. Odaga (1994) opines that widows' care was done as an expression of love and respect to the family of the deceased. "The church has done very little to see to it that the needs of genuine widows were met appropriately. From the beginning of its ministry, the church had a concern for believing widows, (Acts 6:1; 9:39). Of course, the nation of Israel had sought to care for widows; and God had given special legislation to protect them (Deut. 10:18; 24:17; Isa. 1:17). God's special care for the widows is a recurring theme in the Scripture (Deut. 14:29; Ps. 94:6; Mal. 3:5). It was only right that the local church show compassion to these women who were in need. According to David, (2013) James elevates the activity of caring for widows and orphans as the very essence of pure and undefiled religion.

However, the church must be careful not to waste her resources on people who really are not in need. There are individuals and entire families that "milk" local churches, while they themselves refuse to work or to use their own resources wisely. As long as they can get hand-outs from the church, why bother to go to work and made a living for themselves? Paul listed the qualifications a widow must meet if she is to be supported by the church.

This study was conducted to identify how best widowhood care can be applied in relation to biblical principle. The Bible speaks highly of widows who desperately need the church's help and support from their relatives. Thus the paper focuses on Paul's instruction in 1 Timothy 5:3-5, 8, on the criteria to use in selecting widows that should be cared for and its implication for the church.

The Biblical Basis for the Care of Widows

The term "widow" is found approximately one-third of time in legal texts, one-third in prophetic texts, and one-third in wisdom and historical literature, Stephen, (1996). But the vast majority of the contexts are legal in nature, either dealing with justice (the legal protection of the widow) or injustice (the exploitation of her status), Smith (1901). In the former case, the Old Testament is replete with legislation that attempted to provide a social security net for the widow: she was not to be exploited (Exod. 22:21-22; Deut. 27:19); she was specifically permitted to glean the fields and vineyards during harvest time (Deut. 24:14; Ruth 2); tithes were to be shared with her (Deut. 14:29; 26:12-13); provision was to be made for her at the main religious feasts (Deut. 16:9-15s); her garment could not be taken as collateral for a loan (Deut. 24:17); and the levirate institution would not only provide an heir for the land for childless widows, it would help them to be integrated back into the society, Stephen(1996).

In Biblical times, the term for "widow" sometimes acquired the connotation of a person living in extreme poverty. While this was not always the case, widows were nevertheless prime targets for exploitation. It was because of this vulnerable state that God himself took steps to secure the protection of widows, commanding his people to show compassion and sensitivity towards them in their need, Brian & Austin (2015).

A 'widow' is a woman who has lost her husband to death, who has outlived the man she married; especially when such a woman has not remarried, (Webster, 1973:2090). The status of the widow in Bible times and even in our contemporary society can be aptly described as precarious, burdensome, mentally, financially, emotionally and physically draining. Biblical corpus considered widowhood as a reproach to the surviving spouse (Isa. 54:4). "*The fate most feared and bewailed by a woman was to become a widow*", (Kittel, 1964). Lamentations 1:1 hints that being a widow is like being a slave. Also, Spencer (1994) in his assertion, defined widows as a distinctive group of persons sharing certain social characteristics pertaining to gender and family status, all widows are women with deceased husband.

Smith (1901) the legislation acknowledged the fact of the vulnerability of the widow and many Old Testaments texts indicate that she was victimised repeatedly (Exod. 22:22-23; Isa. 1:23; 10:2; Ezek. 22:7; Mal. 3:5). The prophets were the champions of exploited widows. As far as they were concerned, repentance began with redressing wrongs done to such unfortunate women (Isa. 1:17; Jer. 7:6; 22:3; Zech. 7:10). Wisdom texts encouraged a benevolent attitude towards widows. Job's comforters accused him of heinous crimes, particularly of oppressing the widow (Job 22:9), but he countered the argument that he never sent away a begging widow without food and he often made her broken heart sing (Job 29:13; 31:16). Also, Stephen, (1996) asserts that God's prophets were sent as messengers with the directive to his people: "Don't hurt my little ones". Even non-Hebrew widows could trust in him (Jer. 49:11) under the Mosaic dispensation, no legal provision was made for the maintenance of widows. They were left dependent partly on the affection of relations, more

especially of the eldest son, whose birth right or extra share of the property, imposed such a duty upon him, and partly on the privileges accorded to other distressed classes, such as a participation in the triennial third tithe (14:29, 26:12), in leasing (24:19-21) and in religious feasts. (Deut. 16:11, 14). With regards to the remarriage of widows, the only restriction imposed by the mosaic law had reference to the contingency of one being left childless in which case the brother of the deceased husband had the right to marry the widow, (Deut. 25:5-6) and Matt 22:23-30).

Smith, (1901) argues that widows were prominent in the New Testament. It was no accident that one of the poorest of the widows, Anna, was privileged to greet the infant messiah (Luke 2:36-38). The adult Jesus followed in the footsteps of his predecessors with his concern for the plight of the widows. He healed a widow's son because of compassion for his mother (Luke 7:1-17), he protested the exploitation of widows (Mark 12:40), he reversed the standard by which people were judged with the parable of the widow's tithe, the widow gave from her poverty while the wealthy merely offered from their abundance (Mark 12:41-42). In another parable, the church was compared with an importunate widow who kept demanding that her case be heard and the redressing of all wrongs against her (Lk 18:1-8).

Smith, (1901) believes that in the apostolic church, the widows were sustained at the public's expense, the relief being daily administered in kind, under the superintendence of officers appointed for this special purpose, a special fund was instituted for widows (Acts 6:1-6) and as the church matured, the younger widows were urged to remarry while a special class of widows was maintained economically. Particularly, directions are given by Saint Paul as to the class of person entitled to such public maintenance (1Tim5:3-16). Out of the body of such widows, a certain number was to be enrolled, the qualification for such enrolment being that they were not under 60 years of age, that they had been (the wife of one man) probably meaning 'but once married', they had led useful and charitable lives (1Tim5:9-10). Stephen (1996), in his submission, affirmed that the early church, the messianic community, defined the essence of true religion as demonstrating compassion to the poor and the needy, in particular the widow and the orphans (Jam 1:27).

Exegesis of 1 Timothy 5:3-5, 8.

³Χήρας τίμα τήσῃν τω σχήρας.
⁴εἰρήτις χήρα τήκνα ἢ ἡκγονα
 ἢ χεῖ, μανθάνῃ τωσαν
 πρή τον τήν ἴδιον οἶκον ἐσεβέη
 ν κατή μοιβής ἢ ποδιδήναι τοῖς
 προγῆνοῖς, τοῦ τογῆρήστιν
 ἢ πῆ δεκτονῆν ἢ πῆ θεοῦ.
⁵ἢ δῆ ἢ ν τω σχήρα κα ἢ
 μεμονωμένη ἢ λπικεν ἢ πῆ θεῖν
 κα ἢ προσμῆνει ταῖς δεήσεσιν
 κα ἢ ταῖς προσευχαῖς νυκτῆς
 κα ἢ ἡμῆρας.⁸ εἰρήτις τή ν ἴδιων

1 Timothy 5:3-5, 8: (RSV)

³ Honour widows who are real widows. ⁴ If a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn their religious duty to their own family and make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God. ⁵ She who is a real widow, and is left all alone, has set her hope on God and

<p>καὴ μήλιστα οἴκεθ' ἠέ προνοεῖται, τὴν πύρτιν ἠρνηται καὴ ἥστιν ἠπύρτου χεῖρων.</p>	<p>continues in supplications and prayers night and day;⁸ If any one does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.</p>
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A Critical Exegetical Interpretation of 1 Timothy 5:3-5, 8

During Paul's fourth missionary journey, he had instructed Timothy to care for the church at Ephesus (1 Tim.1:3) while he went on to Macedonia. However, when Paul realised that he might not return to Ephesus in the near future, he wrote this first letter to Timothy to develop the charge he had given Timothy before. In this chapter, Paul gives Timothy many instructions on how to deal with various groups of people within the church. He reiterates that it is the responsibility of overseers (elders) and pastors to reprove sin in the church and to discipline church members. However, it is never suitable to harshly rebuke an older person. Rather, the pastor should treat older people with the respect he would show to his own parents. Paul further explains that Timothy should advise and admonish younger members of the church as he would his own brothers and sisters. He then changes his topic of discussion and focuses on widow care, saying that caring for widows is a very important Christian duty and so the church was obliged to take into consideration the welfare of widows in the church (Miruka, et.al (2015).

In 1 Timothy 5:3-8, Apostle Paul instructs Timothy with regards to handling the problems with widows. This discussion is one of the most extensive on a particular subject in the entire epistle. This indicates that this was a significant problem in the Ephesians' Christian community and therefore expresses urgency for this situation to be dealt with promptly and correctly. In this periscope Paul identifies three different types of widows. First, are real widows who are in need and have no relatives to support them materially? Second, are widows who have relatives who can support them materially (1 Tim.5:4). Third, are widows who have a self-indulgent lifestyle (1 Tim.5:6-7). Paul teaches that only the first group is to be supported materially by the Ephesians' Christian community. However, as much as the church supports the widows with the benevolence fund, they should be careful, for there will always be those who are in need and those who want to take advantage. The relatives and the children of the second group were actually responsible to financially support this category of widows. The third group was not worthy of any financial support. However, to the fourth group in verse 9 to 14 Paul recommends them to remarry and not only so, but to be supported by their husbands who will make sure that they are kept occupied so that they do not become busybodies and gossips. The Apostle did not want the church to waste her financial resources on people who are really not in need. In 1 Timothy 5:3-8, Apostle Paul instructs Timothy about those widows to be enrolled to receive benefits from the church and the widows who should not. This however, is not an official order of widows because this passage does not address the duties of widows but rather simply the qualifications that must be met by widows in order for them to be supported by the church.

1 Timothy 5:3- *χήρας τίμα τήσῃ υἱωσχήρας* “Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need”. This verse begins the periscope that ends in 1 Timothy 5:16 and addresses the issue of which widows in the Ephesians' Christian Community were eligible to receive financial aid from the church. It also contains the omission of conjunctions to emphasize the prohibition in 1 Timothy 5:3 in the sense that Paul wants Timothy to dwell upon it and obey it. This figure emphasizes the importance of this command for the Christian community in Ephesus. According to the *New Analytical Greek Lexico*, the word 'widow' is translated *chera* (*χήρα*) meaning a woman whose husband has died. Greek word *χήρα* is a noun in the nominative case and its gender is feminine. Friberg (2000) explains that, “The word *chera* which in Hebrew is translated “bereft” conveys a sense of suffering loss or being left alone.

In the context of the Apostle, the word 'widow' specifically refers to a special category of widows, namely those who are not receiving financial and material support from their children or relatives. It refers to those who are in need materially because they do not have children to support them materially. 'Give proper recognition' implies, to provide for widows who have no children or relatives to support them as an expression of honouring them. It was done as an expression of love and respect to the family of the deceased. The Greek word *τιμαω* simply means to 'revere' or 'value'. The widows had to be honoured if they meet the criteria that Paul later stated in 1 Timothy 5:3 which is simply a reminder to Timothy to continue doing what they talked about before Paul left for Macedonia.

'Widows indeed' (*ἡντιωσχήρας*) the phrase 'widows indeed' is qualified by the Greek term *οἰτός* which is translated “desolate” which means having been left alone. It also indicates that no one is able to help her. The “widows indeed” refers to those widows who meet the qualifications presented by Paul in this chapter making them eligible for material aid from the church but does not deny that other widows are not widows in the normal sense of the word.

1 Timothy 5:4 consist of two parts: Protasis which is the first part of a conditional sentence, whereas an apodosis is the second complementary part. The Protasis, is 'if a widow has children or grandchildren,' and the apodosis is 'then' these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.' Miruka, (2015) Citing Levisohn, (2000) asserts, “she” is hypothetical, for it is speaking of those widows who have children or grandchildren who can support them in contrast to those mentioned in verse 3 who do not have children or relatives to support them”. Therefore, it refers to a Christian widow who does not qualify to receive material aid from the Christian community in Ephesus. It is referring to Christian widow in order to teach a principle that is always applicable for Christians. “Children” is the noun *τεκνον* which speaks of the offspring or children of the particular Christian widow or hypothetical Christian widow. The Greek term *ἐκγῆνος* translated “nephews” means 'descendants' or 'grandchildren' George (1992) in Miruka, et al (2015).

The apodosis indicates that children and grandchildren of widows must be taught to care for their parents and grandparents. This refers to the act of carefully communicating and instructing the children and grandchildren of widows in a face to face manner with regard to their responsibilities towards their parents. This would involve teaching them the implications of the commandment in Exodus 20:12 to honour one's father and mother. It is communicating the authoritative proclamation of God's will to Christian children and grandchildren with respect to their responsibilities to their parents and grandparents, therefore, revealing their true

spirituality in the context of family relationships. According to *Strong*, (Strong's 1901:113), the adjective 'first' (*πρῆτος*) means “foremost” in time, place, order or importance. '*πρῆτος*' emphasizes the that children and grandchildren of widows should learn through instruction to fulfil the financial duties to their parents. It also emphasises that children and grandchildren should exercise godliness in their own family.

The third part of 1 Timothy 5:4 explains in greater detail what Paul meant by his previous statement that children and grandchildren of widows are to exercise godliness with their own families by providing material support to their parents and grandparents. This is a clear responsibility of the children for their parents including grandparents. Vines elaborates the word “repay” in his dictionary by saying, “The word “repay” is the Greek word that means “recompense”, '*ἠμειβῆμαι*' is to repay, which is not found in the New Testament is used with the verb '*ἀπὸδομις*' meaning to 'render'. In 1 Timothy 5:4 this use is illustrated in the papyri by way of conferring a benefaction in return for something” Miruka, P. et al (2015) citing Vines, (1997). This indicates that children are to give back a return to their forebears which includes material support. Besides providing material items such as food, clothing and housing, parents also should give intangible assets such as love and encouragement to their children. This will *give* a great and happy privilege for children to also return a small measure of the tremendous support they have received from their parents.

Fourth, is the causal clause which is connected to the exegetical clause and so presents the reason for the exegetical clause and the apodosis. The word '*ἐνώπιον*', an adjective and its gender is neuter and means 'before' or 'in the presence of', as in Luke 5:25, 8:47, Rev 4:5. The word *θεοῦ* is used to denote one true God and in Septuagint *θεοῦ* is a translation of the Hebrew words '*Elohim*' former indicating his 'power and pre-eminence'. The causal clause presents the reason why Paul wants the children and grandchildren of widows to fulfil their financial obligations to them. It indicates that fulfilling one's material obligations to one's parents and grandparents is pleasing and acceptable to the Father since this is in accordance with God the Father's will and also an exercise of godliness and honours him.

1 Timothy 5:5. The phrase 'widows indeed' is the English equivalent of the Greek phrase *ἠντωσχῆρα* which is also translated as 'desolate' meaning 'having been left alone'. This also indicates that no one was able to help them. In ancient times widows were in an especially difficult position because honourable employment for them was not readily available. Perhaps some could receive help through family or friends but many lived in poverty never having received an inheritance. The outlook for many was a test whereby believers demonstrated the genuineness of their faith. In Paul's context the “widows who are really in need” refers to a widow who does not have children or relatives to support them materially. She is the widow who meets the qualification presented by Paul in verse 5 making her eligible for material support from the church. “She who is left alone puts her hope in God” *μεμονωμένη ἠλπικεν ἐπὶ θεοῦ*. The Greek phrase *ἠλπικεν ἠπί θεῶν* is translated as 'puts her hope in God and implies having a confident expectation and has to do with the unseen and the future. The word *ἠλπικεν* is in the perfect active indicative singular and it describes a true widow who confidently expects to receive logistical grace from God, for example, his provision to meet her daily needs (Matthew 6:25-34; Hebrews 13:5). The word also refers to her confident expectation of receiving God's rewards for faithful service because of her faith and good deeds in the past.

1 Timothy 5:8. The word '*προνοεῶ*' means to have in mind to do; to provide for, care for,

take care of Miruka & Louw (1996: 220) explains the verb *προνοεω* as a compound word which is composed of the preposition 'pro' which means 'before' and the verb *νοεω* which means 'to take thought'. In later writings among the Greeks and Septuagint, it also could mean to 'care for, provide or be concerned about'. The word appears only three times in the New Testament (Rom 12:17, 2Cor 8:21, 1Tim 5:8). In the above verses, the verb '*προνοεω*' means, "To have regard for, take into consideration, carefully consider. The verb '*προνοεω*' in 1 Timothy 5:8 is used of believers to provide materially for the widows who are in one's own lineage.

The word '*μῆλιστα*' is an elative superlative adverb and appears a dozen times in the Greek New Testament (Acts 20:28, Gal. 6:10, Phil. 4:22, 1Tim. 4:10). Miruka et al Citing Thayer (1996:613), gives the following meanings, 'to an unusual degree, most of all, especially, particularly. Louw and Nida define the word as, 'a very high point on a scale of extent', 'very much', 'particularly', exceptionally (Louw and Nida 1996:280) in Miruka, (2015). In 1 Timothy 5:8, the adverb '*μῆλιστα*' functions as a superlative adverb meaning, "especially" and is used to single out those who are members of immediate Christian family such as parents and grandparents. It denotes an exact point on a scale of extent. The term is actually emphasising the command for the Christians' responsibilities to care for their own parents and grandparents and even beyond one's own extended family.

"oikeios" is derived from "oikos" which means, 'of a house, what belongs or related to a house or household'. Thus here in 1 Timothy 5:8, the word denotes "one's own immediate family". Thus the Christian is to provide for those women in his own immediate family who are widows. The statement, 'He has denied the faith' is composed of articular, accusative case and feminine singular. The noun '*τὴν πίστιν*', "the faith" and is followed by the third person singular perfect middle indicative form of the verb '*ἠρνεομαι*', "he has denied". The verb '*ἠρνεομαι*' means, 'to refuse'. However, at times it could mean, "To reject or to decline" and even, "to deny something or someone". The word occurs only six times in the Septuagint and in Genesis 18:15 it is used of Sarah, "denying" that she laughed when the Lord promised that she and her husband would have a child a year later. The term also occurs 33 times in the New Testament.

In 1 Timothy 5:8, the verb '*ἠρνεομαι*' means "to reject" and its object is an articular with a noun '*πίστιν*' which denotes that body of doctrine taught by the Lord and the apostles. Thus, '*πίστιν*' is synonymous with the gospel and speaks of it as that which the church believes. Therefore, the verb refers to the Christian refusing to obey the teaching of the Lord and the apostles which constitutes the New Testament. The term speaks of the Christian refusing to obey the command to support the widows materially when they are in need. The noun '*πίστιν*' is used in an objective sense for the Christian faith. It refers to the content of what Paul taught the Gentile churches, in other words as a description of the gospel. It also refers to the gospel from the perspective of a body of doctrine or that which is believed by the church. Commenting on the phrase, 'and is worse than unbeliever', Knight (1992) writes, "such a person is worse than unbeliever, because Paul regards believers as having the word of the law written on their hearts and therefore even unbelievers are known to do instinctively the things of the law (Roms. 2:14-15, 1Cor. 5:1). Thus, for a professed believer who has God's law and fails to do what even many unbelievers do warrants the verdict that he is "worse than an unbeliever"

The conjunction *καὶ* is an adjunct, meaning that it is introducing a statement that

presents an additional consequence of Christian failing to support members of his household who are widows and need material support. The word denotes 'an emphatic amplification' of the denial of Christian faith; the Christian who fails to provide for those widows in his immediate and extended family is worse than an unbeliever. The verb 'εἶμῃ' means, 'to exist in a particular state or condition' which is complemented by the expression 'ἥπιστουχείρων', 'worse than unbeliever'. This describes a Christian who does not provide for the material needs of his parents or grandparents.

Implication of 1Tim 5:3-5, 8 to the Church

The opening instruction of St. Paul in 1 Timothy 5:3 controls the thought of the whole passage. The church must properly recognize its needy widows (literally, "real widows"). Proper recognition ("honour") was to be expressed in practical support. The practical implications of this are that while the church does well in putting in place a program to take care of widows, it must not shy away from putting in place a fool proof mechanism to make sure that every widow that receives help is really worthy of the help. It must also ensure that those who are supposed to get help are all captured within the widow help program as suggested by St. Paul in 1Tim 5:3-8. Michael, (2013) believes that, if the widow has family members who can take care of her, then they should be taking care of her. She is not a "real" widow, and the church does not need to treat her in the same way that the church deals with a widow who has no one to help her. The TNIV explains the idea in this way: "Give proper recognition to those widows *who are really in need.*" But good stewardship of the church's limited resources and protection of its reputation required the leadership to decide who the "real" widows in the church were and whether other means of support were available (NIV).

One of the key objectives of the Church in caring for widows is being a catalyst in getting family members involved in caring for their own. '*But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house*': here is the manifest distinction between his own, ἑαυτοῦ and his own household, οἴκετόν they are distinguished by terms in the Greek, and as to the care which men and women ought to extend to them. By his own, he means his relations, all of a man's family or stock; by his own household, he seems to mean those who cohabit with him. Paul wanted Christian families to be as mutually supportive as possible. He insisted that children and grandchildren take care of the widows in their families, for this would show godliness at homeland it would please God very much, (Adam, 1967).

The Apostle said that he who is careless of providing for the former, (so far as he is able), but especially for the latter, hath denied the Christian faith, that is, in the practice of it, though in words he professes it; he lives not up to the rule of the gospel, which directs other things. To make widow's care holistic, children who are able to take care of their aged widowed parents should have encouragement from the church to do so. They needed a program of instruction to prevent them from being negligent. In order words, the Church has the prerogative to reach out to children whose mother belong to the church who are widows by encouraging them to take care of their widowed mother. If there are widows whose children are quite young and are not able to cater for their mothers, then the church has a responsibility to care for these widows.

Conclusion

From the study, it was observed that the role the Church has to play in addressing the plight of the widows should be well spelt out as recommended by St. Paul in 1 Timothy 5:3-5 & 8. The

Church should not always address the care of widows from the point of the general welfare to the less privilege in the Church. The church is expected to educate and admonish the children, relatives of the widows on how to cater for their widowed mothers. And this they can do by setting up a ministry that can look into the affairs of the widows and address their needs. The church cannot single-handedly meet the various needs of the widows among them. When they follow St. Paul's injunction, the burden on the church will become light.

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