

1Tim 5:8 Correctly Translated

In most Bibles, 1Tim 5.8 states: **But if any provideth not for his own, and specially his own household, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever.** This scripture is often quoted by many to support the teaching that a man is responsible for the support of those who are his own. If this is what it says, then each of the 12 apostles and possibly even Christ, if Joseph was dead, is “worse than an unbeliever”!! I am not suggesting that a man is not responsible for the support of those who are his own, but 1Tim 5:8 can not be used for this purpose as it is not talking about a man supporting his family.

Unfortunately, this is just another example of incorrect translation which seriously affects what we think, teach and do. For those interested, the Greek for the verse and a literal translation in brackets follows: *ει (if) δε (but) τις (anyone) των (of-the) ιδιων (own-(ones)) και (and) μαλιστα (mostly) οικειων (of-household-[members]) ου (not) προνοει (he,she,it-is-providing), την (the) πιστιν (faith) ηρνηται (he,she,it-has-denied) και (and) εστιν (he,she,it-is) απιστου (of-unbeliever) χειρων (worse-(one))*. The words in blue highlight those soon to be seen as relevant to this short study.

With the exception of this single verse, the rest of the passage, verses 3-16, is all about widows and only widows and their responsibilities. Let's see it in context with the reference to widows and females highlighted in red.

“Honor widows that are widows indeed. But if any widow hath children or grandchildren, let them learn first to show piety towards their own family, and to requite their parents: for this is acceptable in the sight of God. Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, hath her hope set on God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day. But she that giveth herself to pleasure is dead while she liveth. These things also command, that they may be without reproach. But if any provideth not for his own, and specially his own household, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever. Let none be enrolled as a widow under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, well reported of for good works; if she hath brought up children, if she hath used hospitality to strangers, if she hath washed the saints' feet, if she hath relieved the afflicted, if she hath diligently followed every good work. But younger widows refuse: for when they have waxed wanton against Christ, they desire to marry; having condemnation, because they have rejected their first pledge. And withal they learn also to be idle, going about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not. I desire therefore that the younger widows marry, bear children, rule the household, give no occasion to the adversary for reviling: for already some are turned aside after Satan. If any woman that believeth hath widows, let her relieve them, and let not the church be burdened; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed.”

Verse 8 abruptly changes from talking about widows to talking about men caring for their own. Is this sudden change valid? A detailed look into the Greek of the verse shows a different picture.

In the Koine Greek language, there is no distinction between the masculine, feminine and neuter genders in 3rd person singular verbs. That is, the verbs themselves do not distinguish gender and can legitimately be translated “he, she or it ...”. Let's consider the verbs first.

There are three verbs used in 1Tim 5:8: *προνοει* (he, she, it is providing), *ηρνηται* (he, she, it has denied), *εστιν* (he, she, it is). Each verb could legitimately be translated in any one of the three genders IF there were no other indications to the contrary within the sentence. Thus it is left to two other words within the sentence (*τις*, and *χειρων*) to determine the gender of the verse. When we consider *τις*, the neuter gender is now excluded, because *τις* translated “any one” at the beginning of the verse can be either masculine or feminine but NOT neuter since the neuter form of *τις* is *τι*. Thus we are now left with either the masculine or feminine genders as possibilities. The only other word in the sentence which might give a clue as to which of these two genders is correct, is the Greek word for “worse”, *χειρων* – a comparative adjective. Unfortunately, this word also has the same spelling for both the masculine and feminine gender forms and so, we are still unable to determine the gender of this verse from the words used within the sentence. The next means of determining the gender of these words falls to the context of the verse.

Certainly, when rendered in the masculine gender, the continuity of thought is broken since widows are spoken of both immediately before and immediately after this verse. That there should be continuity is implied in the connector “But”, *δε*, which begins verse 8, in the English. However, for the continuity and context of the paragraph to remain consistent, we must conclude that the verse should be in the feminine gender. Thus the verse should read: **But if any provideth not for her own, and specially her own household, she hath denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever.** When we do put it in the feminine, the meaning of this verse becomes totally different and in fact focuses attention on widows and their responsibility to those in their homes.

Once this verse is translated correctly, the apostles are relieved of any wrong doing when they left behind livelihood and families to follow Christ, and Christ Himself, as eldest son, is relieved of any wrong doing by leaving His mother on her own if Joseph had already died.

Because this translation provides a radically different meaning to the one universally translated, I sort confirmation of this thinking from a Greek Scholar Dr L.M. (PhD) who was associated with the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Melbourne. Our abbreviated conversation went along these lines:

Writer: My study has shown that this verse could be translated in either the feminine or masculine gender.

Dr L.M.: *(emphatic) No! it is masculine because τις is masculine.*

Writer: I agree *τις* can be masculine but it can also be feminine since the feminine form of this word is also *τις*.

Dr L.M.: Ah yes, that is true.

Writer: As I see it, because the verbs don't help us, this leaves only one other word, *χειρων*, which might help to determine gender but this too has the same spelling for both genders.

Dr L.M.: *Yes. Well,..... the context then must tell us or, if not, perhaps the custom of the day.*

The very interesting thing about this conversation is this. Had I not known that the

feminine form of $\tau\iota\varsigma$ was also $\tau\iota\varsigma$ then I would never have pursued the conversation after his emphatic “No” and would have gone away absolutely assured that the masculine gender was correct and I would have armed myself in discussions with, “Dr. L.M. said so”.

We can so easily be lead astray which is why I think Jesus had this warning for us: “blind guides leading the blind and they both shall fall in the pit”. I am left without any excuse. I must check things out for myself.