

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Widows in the Church, Part 1

Scripture: 1 Timothy 5:3-4

Code: 54-36

Open your Bible to our study of 1 Timothy, if you will. We've been looking to 1 Timothy now for many months. We find ourselves in chapter 5 and beginning at verse 3 a section on widows in the church.

It may seem at the very outset that that's a rather small subject, a rather insignificant subject, certainly not one of the weightier subjects that ought to occupy our minds. But just the opposite is true. It is a very important subject, it is a very far-reaching subject. In fact, Paul speaks to this issue from verse 3 all the way through verse 16, a very prolonged discussion of the matter of widows in the church. It is for the instruction of Timothy who is giving leadership to the church at Ephesus. It is for the instruction of any church. It is for our instruction as well, and we shall note that as we study the passage.

I want you to know that there is so much here and its implications are so vast and so provocative that it probably will take us at least three weeks to get through these verses. And that's not because I'm stretching at all, that's because I'm...I'm trying simply to deal with what the text says. I often get cards from people who say, "You're going too slow, can't you please speed it up?" And I want you to know I am trying with all my heart to do that, but the fact is when you're dealing with the truth of God's Word, we must understand it and we must take the time to understand it in its context and therefore it takes time to grasp the meaning of a passage by reconstructing the scene in which that passage was originally written. And we need to do that with this text.

Then also to apply it to our own situation. The care of widows in the church is a very vital issue and I'll try to outline in our initial study this morning precisely why.

Let me begin our thinking by saying that always...always without exception in God's design, women are to be the special object of care. Women are to be the object of provision and preservation and protection. God tells us in Scripture that woman is the weaker vessel. Man then the stronger vessel is her protector. She is to be under the umbrella of male protection, provision, authority, and direction. Because of this, widows, women without a husband, women who have lost their husband and therefore their means of support, are very special concerns of the heart of God. He takes a great interest in protective care relative to a woman who has lost her husband.

The other group of people who come into the unusual protective care of God would be orphans. And as I read in Psalm 68, He is the Father of the fatherless and He is the judge of the widows. He is particularly concerned to protect those who have lost their protection, their preservation and their

provision. Children, as you well know, are to be under the care, leadership and protection of their parents. When a child loses that, that child becomes the object of special compassion on the part of God. Women also are to be under the protection and care of their husbands or their fathers and when they lose those opportunities and those privileges and that area of protection, God then takes up their case. Widows then by God's design are uniquely His concern. They receive from Him sincere pity and merciful treatment. And all those people who name the name of God and identify with Him should so treat widows in a manner that would be consistent with how God treats them.

I might add as a footnote here that women are no where in Scripture ever seen to be providers for themselves. There are those women who are enterprising and justifiably so, but women are always seen as the ones for whom provision is made, for whom protection is given. And women are those who are the weaker vessel in need of a stronger vessel to complement their life. In fact, when a woman is widowed, if we were to look at the Old Testament for example, we would find that God takes up their case in a very unique way. He blesses those who bless widows and He curses those who curse widows. If you read Deuteronomy 27:19 you will read a curse from God on those who abuse widows. If you read Isaiah 1:17 and 18 and Jeremiah 22:3 and 4 and many other Scriptures, you will find a blessing pronounced on those who bless widows or who properly care for them.

In Exodus 22:23 God says when widows cry out and no one hears their cry, He says, "I will hear your cry." God knows and God comes to the assistance of such a person.

It is by God's design, then, that women are to be protected. And when they lose their human protection, God becomes their unique protector. But also we learn from Scripture that the ideal future for a widow is remarriage. The Old Testament indicates that when a woman is widowed, she has every right to remarry. In fact, we shall learn in this passage that younger widows who are under 60 years of age are encouraged to marry again. Why? Because it is God's design for a woman to be protected, preserved, cared for, nurtured, supported and supplied by a man. Where there was no remarriage, where that was delayed or where that was impossible in the Old Testament a widow could stay in her father's house. Genesis 38:11 gives us an illustration of this. And there she would come under the protection of her own father, if that were the case. Or a widow could stay under the protection of her mother-in-law's house, her father-in-law, also indicated to us by the illustration of Ruth in chapter 1 verse 16 of the book of Ruth where she chose to go into the house of her mother-in-law to find provision and protection there.

Furthermore, under a provision in the Old Testament called "levirate marriage," when a woman was widowed it was Jewish law that the brother of her dead husband should marry her or if indeed that brother had already been married, the next of kin who was not married would then marry the widow in order to raise up godly seed and in order to bring her under care and protection. Such is illustrated in Genesis 38:11 and given instruction in Deuteronomy 25:5 to 10 and also the example is given us of Ruth and Boaz, Boaz being the next of kin of Ruth's dead husband, took up her cause, married her,

became her husband and her protector and provider.

So, in the Old Testament we find then two major ideas regarding the widow. One, when a woman is bereft of a husband she becomes the special care of God. Two, she is encouraged to find shelter in another marriage for the protection that is there or in the home of a relative where she can find the proper kind of support.

In the New Testament we find also that our Lord Jesus Christ demonstrates to us the heart of God toward widows. And I want you to look with me at a few passages before we come to 1 Timothy. Mark chapter 12 is a good place to start. Mark chapter 12, and this will just sort of tell us a bit about widows that we face in the New Testament time. Jesus in verse 41 of Mark 12 sat opposite the treasury, that's the place where people came to give their money to the temple. They would put it in these receptacles that were attached to the wall, the court of the women. They would come into the temple treasury and put their offering in the proper receptacle for whatever offering they were bringing. And Jesus sat there and He watched the people put money into the treasury, and many that were rich put in much. And there came a certain poor widow. And here we get a little bit of a cultural insight into the state of widowhood at that time. Widows were poor. They were without means. There was no gainfully employed...well I shouldn't say no, there was rarely gainfully employed widows because women were not given places of employment in that society. Customarily a woman would find it very difficult to obtain some kind of self-employment and so widows, if their husbands left them destitute and without means, were usually very poor. We are introduced to such a poor widow here. When she came to give her offering she gave what amounts to a few cents, two mites which add up to nothing but a penny. He called to Him His disciples and said, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow has cast in more than all they who have cast into the treasury, for all they did cast in of their abundance but she ever want did cast in all that she had, even all her living." And here we see the godliness and the devotion of this dear woman who having nothing gave it all. That's the spirit of generosity in the heart of one devoted to the worship of God.

But we get the picture here of the poverty which was somewhat typical of widowhood in biblical times. It fell upon the synagogues and upon the people of God, Israel, in that day to do something to relieve this poverty of widows and customarily the synagogues would have a collection group that would go out every Friday morning and they would circle the city and collect goods and money from the various people, bringing it back on Friday afternoon, distributing it out to the widows before Friday night sundown which began the Sabbath. And that's how they ministered the small amount that they did minister to the poor widows. But what we learn from the passage is the poverty of a widow and something of a widow's dependency on God.

In Luke chapter 7 we look at another illustration and we'll see several of them in Luke. Luke seems to write more about widows than any other writer. We really get a very good insight into the heart of God related to widows in this particular record beginning in verse 11. "It came to pass the next day after

His healing the centurion servant, that Jesus went into a city called Nain and many of His disciples went with Him and many people. He came near to the gate of the city, behold there was a dead man carried out on a bier," which is a transported casket usually carried on the shoulders of some men. And this is the thing you want to note, "This man, this dead man was the only son of his mother and she was a widow." And here is again a situation of desolation. This woman has lost her husband. She has not the support she needs from him. She does have one son and undoubtedly this one son is really the one caring for his widowed mother. And I again emphasize that this is how God sees a woman as the one to be protected, provided for and preserved by a man, in this case the son. But the son is dead. And this is the funeral of the son.

So here is a woman who has lost her husband and then she has lost her son. No man is left in that immediate family then to care for her. When the Lord saw her, in verse 13, He had compassion on her. Why? Because God has an unusual compassion for those who are widows. A great heart of compassion for those who are without means of support and protection. "He said to her, Stop weeping." And He is touched, I might add, by compassion. He is touched by the burden of this woman without any male support. "He came and touched the bier, or the casket, and they that bore him stood still and He said, Young man, I say unto you arise. And he that was dead sat up and began to speak. And He delivered him to his mother." And that was the whole point. Jesus was so touched in His heart that this woman was without a man in her life to care for her and provide for her and support her that He raised her son from the dead and gave the son to this woman.

Look to chapter 18 for a moment, and verse 3...verse 2 says there was a judge in the city who feared not God nor regarded man. In other words, he was a man who was untouchable. But there was a widow in the city in this parable and she came to him. Now here is again a situation of desolation. Here is a typical widow, she has no resources, she has been defrauded of some things and she comes to this judge to try to get back what has been taken wrongfully from her. She came and said, "Avenge me of mine enemy. Mine enemies have taken things from me." We know from the Word of God and we shall see it clearly in studying the gospel record, and we'll even hear Luke writing about it in chapter 20 verse 47, that the scribes and the Pharisees and the leaders of Israel devoured widows' houses. In other words, they took advantage of desolate women. They stole from the poor, if you will. And so here is a woman who somehow has been defrauded. Maybe she was defrauded by...or could have been defrauded by religious leaders through some false claim to her goods on their behalf. But whatever the reason, she was defrauded and she comes to a judge and she's in a state of desperation which demonstrates again the plight of widowhood. And he would not listen to her for a while but afterward he said within himself, "Though I fear not God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me."

I don't fear God or man but this woman is driving me crazy because she keeps coming and asking and asking and asking. And the picture here is of a poor woman who is dependent on getting back what has been taken from her, and desperately trying to get justice out of this judge who finally, not

because he sees it's right but because he wants to get rid of the woman, gives her what she requests. And so again we see the plight of a widow. Deprived to start with, defrauded to add to that. Perhaps this is such a common thing because...a common parable because judges treated widows like that, that's why Jesus uses it, so again it just emphasizes the difficulties and disadvantages of widowhood at the time of Christ.

Chapter 21, Luke repeats the account of Mark about the poor widow who put in two mites. And Jesus said, "Of a truth I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than everyone else because she put in all she had." Again emphasizing her poverty. The picture then is a picture of desolation. The picture of a widow in the time of Christ is a woman who has very little, maybe very devoted to God, giving generously the little that she has, a woman who when defrauded of what little she has desperately cries out for some justice to get it back because she is so dependent on it. This is the bereft woman. This woman became the object of the care of the Jewish synagogue. In Jerusalem, if we can except Luke 20 verse 47 where they devour widows' houses, as a general statement of what was going on in Jerusalem, in Jerusalem the widows weren't faring very well. But likely in outlying cities where the synagogues cared for the widows, they may have been cared for in a better fashion. But nonetheless they were desolate...desolate.

You will remember, I know, that Jesus on the cross only spoke directly to two people. One was a dying wretched sinful vile criminal that He gathered into His arms in the grace of forgiveness and the other was to John and to Mary. And what He did was commit His widowed mother into the care of His beloved disciple because He knew that a woman should not be out from under the protection of a man...and Joseph was dead long before the cross and now Jesus who was the unique protector of His own mother was dying and He puts Jesus...Jesus, I should say, puts Mary into the care of John.

The heart of God comes through in how the Lord speaks about a widow, how He treated His own widowed mother and how He instructs through what we shall read in 1 Timothy, the church, to treat widows. But before we get to that, look at Acts chapter 6. The first ministry that developed in the early church was a ministry to widows. Apart from worship and evangelism, breaking of bread, the communion, the Lord's table, the ministry of the early church was a ministry to widows. They didn't have a lot of programs. They met for worship and prayer and the study of doctrine and they evangelized the lost and the one ministry that really appears first of all in the life of the early church is a widows' ministry, to show you the high priority of that...the church's obligation to take care of desolate women.

Verse 1 of Acts 6, the church has been born. The number of disciples has multiplied and there arose immediately a murmuring, or a dispute, among the Greeks against the Hebrews. Now who are these? Well, the Hebrews would be the Jerusalem Jews, the Palestinian Jews, the Jews of the land of Israel. The Hellenists, or the Greeks or the Grecian Jews were those who lived outside of Palestine. They were the ones that were in the scattering, the dispersed Jews. They were the ones who had come to

Jerusalem for the festivals and the feast days. But their homes were in the Roman Empire elsewhere. They were then Hellenistic Jews, Greek Jews. And then you had the Jerusalem Jews.

Obviously the early church had picked up the ministry of the synagogues and probably done it much more efficiently because of the love of Christ and the power of the Spirit and the true love that was generated in their hearts. And they were ministering to widows. That was a very natural thing. Nobody needed to design it, it just began to happen because it was necessary and it was an expression of the love of God. But apparently there was a bit of an injustice being given toward those Hellenistic Jews who had moved in, heard the gospel, been saved and were now, at least for the time being, living in Jerusalem...probably moved in with families that were resident there. Maybe some of them had just sort of pitched their tent in homes where Christians had let them stay, maybe some of them were staying in inns or whatever. But they were there and because they weren't really a part of the original community, perhaps they weren't as generous with them as they were with their own widows who were from Jerusalem, and so a dispute arose as to how the dole was being passed out to the widows.

Now what this tells us is that the first ministry that really developed spontaneously in the early church was the care of women who were widows. The disciples, the Apostles, the Twelve in verse 2, called together all the disciples, all the ones who were in the church and they said, "It is not fitting for us to leave the Word of God and serve meals." It's not going to be right for us to drop our teaching ministry and go out and try to serve these widows so that everybody gets the right amount. You look among you, verse 3, get seven men of honest report who can be trusted, who won't steal the money they're supposed to give out, who won't steal the food they're supposed to be passing to the widows, men of honesty, full of the Holy Spirit so they'll have great sensitivity to evaluate every widow's need, full of wisdom so they can ascertain the situation. We need to appoint them over this business and we'll go on with prayer and the ministry of the Word. And everybody liked that and they chose Stephen and Philip and Prochorus and Nicanor and Timon and Parmenas and Nicolas. They laid hands on them and they sent them out to do the ministry to widows. Again I say to you, the first ministry developed apart from the normal worship, prayer, teaching, preaching, evangelizing of the church appears to be a ministry to widows, meeting their needs.

Now go to the ninth chapter of Acts to a most fascinating account. In Acts chapter 9 verse 36, there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha which is by interpretation Dorcas, either name is fine. And this woman, the name means a deer or a gazelle. This woman was full of good works and alms deeds which she did. Here is a Christian lady, a disciple, full of good works and alms deed means charity, giving to people who were in need. And it came to pass in those days that she was sick and died. And when she died they washed the body and they laid it in an upper chamber. The Jews did not embalm, they just washed the body and put her upstairs in the home and there would be a viewing and a mourning time and so forth.

Lydda, the town where this occurred was very near to Joppa, so the disciples heard that Peter was there and sent to him two men desiring him that he would not delay to come to them. Peter was near by and so they said, "Go get Peter and bring him here." Knowing that Peter had demonstrated obviously the power of God, he had healed a man along with John at the Gate Beautiful and maybe they felt that he could do something in regard to this lady. Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him in to the upper chamber and all the widows...that's what you want to note...all the widows stood by him weeping and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made while she was with them.

Now I don't know how many there were, but a significant group of widows. Here was a dear lady who used her resources to make clothing for widows. Again what it points up...one, the destitution of widows, the lack of resource and the dependency on someone else...two, the compassionate heart of Christians in the early church to reach out to those specific people. This lady known for her good works and her alms deeds had clothed the widows of her community.

Verse 40, Peter put them all out. Now he did that probably because of the confusion and chaos of all of them in there weeping. They were not hired mourners, they were really broken hearted and so it was easier to put them out than to try stop their tears. So he put them out in order to hear his own prayer, I guess. And he kneeled down and prayed. And turning to the body said, "Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes and when she saw Peter she sat up and he gave her his hand and lifted her up. And when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive." This is the second resurrection that occurs in the New Testament to benefit widows. The first we saw in Luke's gospel in reference to the son of the widow of Nain, and again you see the compassion of God toward the widow. And here these dear widows so broken hearted are comforted because this woman who is so dear to them and so necessary to them is raised from the dead in order to go on with her alms deeds, predominantly in their behalf.

James chapter 1 sums it up for us. We've been studying James. At the end of the first chapter in verse 27 he says this remarkable statement, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this," now that introduction could lead us to imagine all kinds of things. What is pure religion? What is undefiled religion? The answer is, to visit the orphans and widows in their affliction...to visit the orphans and widows in their affliction.

Now listen, beloved, all of this sums up to say, "Look, God has a special compassion, a special care, a special concern for the protection, preservation, provision of widows." Very basic. The early church shows that. Christ shows that. And so, when Paul writes to Timothy here, he has this very lengthy section on the matter of widows because by this time, of course, it is still a vital element of the church's life...to care for widows. And I think, and I know you will as well as we study this, that it is still a vital area for the church's life. We have been committed to this in the past, we shall be committed to this in the future. And I personally believe, as we understand this passage, it is going to present

greater opportunity for us in the future than we have ever imagined because of the conditions in the world in which we live. And I'll explain what I mean as we go along.

Paul then wants Timothy and the church at Ephesus and us to understand our responsibility to widows. He gives five principles. I want to give you the first one and just at least introduce the second one this morning. The first principle is this, verse 3, "Honor widows who are real widows...honor widows who are real widows."

Now let me just give you enough background to understand where Paul is coming from as he writes. Keep this in mind. From the beginning of our study of 1 Timothy I have told you that I believe this epistle is a polemic, that is to say it speaks against some problem. And I believe this church was filled with problems of ungodliness, problems of false doctrines, not the least of which was mishandling the matter of care for widows. The church was as inept at that as it was in all the other things Paul deals with. So this is a corrective passage. We can conclude that that widows were not being properly honored. We can conclude that unqualified older widows were being allowed to serve semi-officially for the church and their lives were really not clear and clean and pure. We can also conclude that younger widows were remarrying unbelievers. Younger widows were breaking vows made to Christ. There were families that weren't supporting their own widows. There were women who could have supported many widows...such as Dorcas did, but they weren't doing that either.

In other words, the whole area of biblical instruction to widows needed to be taught...because of what needed to be corrected at Ephesus. It is a very very basic ministry of the church to care for these women.

Principle number one then in verse 3, the obligation of the church to support widows...the obligation of the church to support widows. I want you to notice the word "widows" because this really is the basis of all of our understanding. Honor widows that are real widows. Now what do we mean by "widows?" To us the word means a woman whose husband is dead. The Greek word includes that but is not limited to that. That's a very important statement. The Greek word includes that but is not limited to that.

The word "widow" is *chera*, it is a word that is a feminine form of an adjective used as a noun. It is an adjective, it means bereft. It means robbed. It means having suffered loss. It carries the idea of being alone. It comes from *cheros*(?) and that's what that means, bereft, robbed, having suffered loss, being left alone. The word then doesn't speak about how a woman got into this situation, it just describes the situation, she is alone, she is bereft, she has suffered the loss of her husband. It doesn't say how she lost the husband. Usually, of course, we would think she lost the husband through death...there's nothing in this word to indicate that it is limited to that. In fact, if you do any kind of study of the word and trace it through any classical Greek usages, you will find that the word means a woman who lost her husband in any fashion...death, divorce, desertion, anything. That can all be summed up in this

word.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

William Barclay, for example, feels it should include those who were polygamists in the Roman world and when they came to Jesus Christ in faith, they may have given freedom to their wives that other than their first wife to leave in order that they might be monogamous, according to the teaching of the Word of God. And when they sent those women away, those women would fall under this same kind of word. They also would be chera, bereft of their husband even though their husband was still alive. There's no reason to indicate that this should exclude people whose husband left them in desertion or divorced them through a legal means. The word simply describes a woman who has lost her husband, whatever that might be in terms of cause.

Now I want you to know that this expands the accountability and the responsibility of the church immeasurably because what we're talking about here is a responsibility to take care of all those women who have lost their husband, which is a very very large company of women. Maybe as large now as at any time in the world's history with divorce and desertion and all of those things such a common every day matter.

Verse 5 helps us to understand further the word. It uses the word "widow" again. And then it says a widow who is a real widow and desolate. That is a passive participle that means having been left alone. And again it doesn't have the idea of death in it, it simply describes the state of a woman who has been left alone because her husband is no longer present. In those days women could not find honorable employment easily, there were no secular institutions to care for them. And so they were in serious straits. They were very often reduced to poverty unless their husband had left something with them or their father had left an inheritance to them, or perhaps they were under the care of a father's family or a mother-in-law's family, or friends or whatever. But many widows were left destitute. And as I said, there was no honorable employment available to women because women were seen as being cared for within the context of the family and the home, not caring for themselves outside that context.

The treatment of these women then was a watershed, was a test case for the love of Christ borne in the hearts of the Christian community. Their spiritual character, the demonstration of their devotion to Christ could be seen in how they cared for people who were desperately in need of that care. And I might add that this has been a part of the church's life throughout all of its history. In fact, the system of Welfare that we have in our own country today and in other countries of the world is a direct legacy of Christian influence. Countries without that Christian influence do not have that kind of legacy of caring for widows. The Welfare system that meets the needs of women who have lost their husband through desertion, death, divorce, imprisonment, whatever it might be, is a direct result of the impact

of Christianity on the roots of this nation, even though there are many in this nation who perhaps would not want to acknowledge that. This has been a reflection of the compassionate heart of God toward those in need.

So what we're talking about here, and you've got to grab this one, is those women who have been bereft of a husband whatever the reason might be. The word then is honor, that's what we're to do for these women, to honor them. What does that mean? What does it mean? It's the verb timao, it means to show respect, to show care, to give support, to treat graciously. And it encompasses the idea of meeting needs whatever they are, financially of course. In fact it is used of pricing something in Matthew 27:9, to put a value on something and then to care for that in light of its value. And certainly there's nothing more valuable than one made by God and a believing woman and nothing more precious to the church than a believing woman desperately in need of the church's care.

The word "honor" implies financial support. I'll show you how we know that. Go back to Matthew 15. In Matthew 15 Jesus is confronted by the scribes and Pharisees in verse 1 and they said, "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?" Now the tradition of the elders was a whole compilation of laws and rules that the Jews had developed that were non-biblical. Some of them contradicted the Bible, all of them added to the Scripture. Some of them tried to explain it one way or another but they were additions to Scripture. Very often they obscured, in fact really by the time they collected all of the stuff it fairly well obscured the intent of Scripture. But believing early on that they had the job of fencing in the law of God, they started to put the fence up and the fence was all these rules, thousands upon thousands upon thousands of rules and interpretations that they thought would fence in the law and protect it from being violated. These became the traditions.

One of the traditions was that before you ate you went through a ceremonial cleansing. It wasn't sanitation. It had nothing to do with having clean hands, it had only to do with religious ceremony. So there was a ceremonial washing and it grew out of the fact that some Jews believed that there was a demon named Shibtaw(?) and that demon dwelt on the hands of people. And if you ate without a religious purification, the demon would come inside of you. So in order to avoid being possessed by a demon you went through a ceremonial hand washing ceremony.

Well Jesus' disciples ate without going through that ceremony. It wasn't a biblical ceremony. There was nothing in the Bible about it at all, it was a silly, foolish, ridiculous tradition that had grown up. So they ignored it. So the Pharisees and scribes come to Jesus and they say, "Why do Your disciples violate the tradition of the elders and not go through this ceremonial washing to get Shibtaw off their hands?" His reply was, "Why do you violate the commandment of God with your tradition?" And then He gives them an illustration of how they were breaking the commandment of God with their tradition. Here's how, "You say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It's a gift, it's Corban(?)," referring to whatever you might be profited by me, "doesn't honor his father or his mother," He says in verse 6.

Now what do you mean by this? Listen, Exodus 20:12, "Honor your father and mother," right? Ten Commandments, Exodus 20:12, honor your father and mother. What does that mean? To the Jews it meant give them money when they need it, support them, care for them. But here's what tradition had grown up. If you had some money and you say it is a gift, it is Corban, it is devoted to God, I pledge it to God, I promise it to God, I vow it to God, then it can't ever go to a lesser person...until you could rescind that vow. So when someone's parents had a need instead of meeting that need these ungodly Jews would take this tradition and they would say, "Boy, I would sure like to give that to you but it is Corban, I have already committed it to God and I certainly couldn't take it from God to give it to you." It was a way of protecting their money from having to be given to their elders and it showed the evil of their hearts. It showed that they had no desire at all to support their parents. So He's saying to them you've developed this little tradition called Corban by which you violate the commandment of God to honor your father and mother. What I want you to see out of this is that Jesus says in interpreting Exodus 20:12 that that honor means giving them money. It means financial support. And you're not willing to do it, so you shelter your money with this foolish tradition and you show yourself, verse 7, to be hypocrites...hypocrites. You say you do it for God and all you want to do is keep it back from your parents.

So now back to 1 Timothy. When Paul says "Honor widows," using the same idea and really borrowing the thought right out of Exodus 20:12, honoring your mother, honoring your father, when he says honor widows, he has in mind not just respect and not just regard but he has also in mind financial support. That basically means they cared for you when you were young, you care for them when their need arises in their old age. So honor widows means to support them, not only with respect and kindness and favor but with financial aid.

Now what are the widows to be supported? It says honor widows that are real widows, or widows indeed, genuine widows. That same phrase is mentioned in verse 5 again, genuine widows, widows indeed. Now what does that mean? Truly bereft, truly alone, truly without resources. Not every woman is in that situation. Not every woman is really bereft. Many husbands have left their wives with wonderful resources. They've left them with a home, a bank account, an insurance policy, whatever it might be, so that they have the where with all to care for their needs financially. In that regard we may not have a responsibility financially to a widow. That doesn't mean we don't have a responsibility in terms of spiritual assistance, in terms of graciousness, kindness, whatever care they might need in their personal life, their spiritual life or whatever. But the point is, financial support is to go to widows who are real widows, that is they have no other source of income. They have lost their husband, they are desolate, as verse 5 uses the word, or literally they have been totally alone and without resources. That's the idea. And again I reiterate to you, and you can read the section in Kittel in which he defines this word chera and points out so clearly this means any woman who has lost her husband. We have a responsibility if she is desolate and has no other resource to take up her case.

Now in our society, as I said, fortunately because of the effect of Christianity we have a Welfare system which, by the way, is continuously defrauded. We trust not by Christian widows who are deserving. We need to come alongside that system and that system can do so much perhaps to provide for a widow. There may be many other needs and I know in the life of our church we are committed to the fact and we continually are eager to serve those widows for whom that is not enough to sustain their life. To serve them in some ways which can make possible them meeting their needs.

There are some widows, for example, there is a widow in our church in a widow in the biblical sense of the word chera whose husband has been sent to prison for a very long time, 30 to 40 years. She is in the state of a woman bereft who has no resources. Grace Community Church is committed to assisting her in every way possible and we have been doing that and will continue to do that because in effect she is a woman robbed of care. There are women in this church since the time I care here who have been regularly and monthly supported by this church in their widowhood because that was what was in the heart of the Christians from even before my time here. That's reflective of the love of Christ in the life of the church of Jesus Christ. There are widows in this church and perhaps you have them in your own home, who we...who live with their children because their children are committed to caring for them. All of these things reflect the biblical standard. Some of them seem so obvious that maybe you never even knew that was the biblical standard. But true widows are to be supported by the body of Christ, the church when they are desolate.

This instruction is very basic. It includes the whole idea of honoring your father and mother and of caring for people with the compassion of the heart of God who is unusually drawn to those who are in this situation.

Now let me just give you a footnote here at this point just to kind of help you see the picture of our society. I have said in the beginning of the message and I say it again with emphasis, that in the future, the burden on the church regarding the care of women who have lost their husband is going to increase. We're grateful for living in a country where there is a system that provides some money for those people. It is money that meets basic needs. Sometimes, of course, the church has to come along and assist them with other things. There are those widows who desire, those women without husbands, single parents who have been divorced and so forth, who desire their children to be educated in a Christian education environment, that's why we have a fund here, a scholarship fund, in order to enable those people who can't because they've lost their husband pay for their children...to put their children here because that fund is available. A couple of Sunday nights ago one of those mothers whose husband is gone gave testimony to the benefit of that scholarship fund. The church comes alongside to do everything to make sure that widow's needs are met.

Now obviously in every individual case the ascertaining of what need is becomes the real issue. Some women before their husband left were used to living on \$18,000 a year. Some were used to living on \$30,000, some \$50,000, some \$70,000 a year or whatever. And we have to take a long look at what standard of living is necessary, not necessarily what standard of living is desired. But we have to be faithful to meet the needs as we feel the needs are right and just and fair relative to the number of children, the number of mouths to be fed, the educational demands, the transportation needs in any given situation. But I tell you, beloved, it is my commitment and the elders discussed this Thursday night and theirs as well, that we shall be obedient to the Word of God in this regard, no matter what the cost and I really believe in the future what it's going to do, it's going to take many dollars out of programs that are simply optional programs for people who don't have need and it's going to rechannel that into programs that are not optional to meet people's very basic needs.

And I'll be happy for that day to come. I really don't want to create an overindulgence kind of situation for people in terms of ministry and the church would do well to cut back a myriad of extraneous ministries if needs be to put money into a budget to meet this basic and biblical demand to show the heart of God and His compassion toward those people who are destitute. The church as the obligation and the privilege of providing for real widows who have no resources. Where they have financial resources, I believe, we still are to come alongside them with encouragement and love and care and support in every way possible on the spiritual level. We need to give attention to that.

So, first of all, it's very important to understand that our society is moving in a direction that is going to raise the level of the church's responsibility immeasurably. Now later on in this text we're going to find out that families ought to take care of their own, in verse 4. But what we're finding today is and it's going to be even worse in the future, is the disintegration of the family is totally destroying that networking. What happens, for example, when a woman is raised in a broken home? Maybe her mother's been married a couple of times, she's had a father and a stepfather which is not atypical at all, but somewhat common. She goes off into a career kind of orientation. Maybe she doesn't get married till she's 26, 27, 28, 29, by that time she's charted her own course. She marries somebody who has charted his own course. They get together. Something happens to him. She's out there, she's had sort of a career kind of background. She's had a very messed up family situation. He dies. She's left with a couple of little kids on her hands. She can't plug back in to an intimate family network because it's long gone if there ever was one. And the burden on the church is even greater.

You see, the price to pay for the disintegration of the family is really monumental. Those widowed women, those women who lose their husbands need to be able as Genesis 38 illustrates to move back into the home of family one way or another. But so often that can't happen, or it won't happen because of the disintegration of the family. The tragedy in the breakdown of the family is the loss of the support network. And it puts the burden even greater on the church.

So first of all, the church has an obligation to support widows. Second point, and we just introduce this with one verse, the obligation of the church to evaluate those widows needing support. It's not a question of everybody get in line, we're just going to give it away. We have to evaluate. The church cannot indiscriminately take on everyone who applies for help. There has to be some criteria and that comes in verses 4 through 8. I just want to introduce verse 4, I think it's so interesting, so important.

If any woman who is bereft of a husband, any widow, has children or grandchildren, *ekgonos* means descendants or grandchildren, not nephews. Now many widows in the church have children and grandchildren. It is the responsibility of the children and the grandchildren to support that widow. That's what he's saying. It says "Let them," that is the children and grandchildren, "learn first to show their godliness in the family." The word home, *oikos*, referring to family. You say you're godly, then let's see it in your family. By the way, the theater in which the true act of godliness or ungodliness is put on is the family, the home, right? When you come to church you are what we...you are what we think you are and you are what you want us to think you are. But in the family you are what you are. You are what you are. There are no masks in the family.

So, if you have children or grandchildren, it is their obligation, it is their reciprocation as close relatives to care for that widow. That's the family's responsibility. And down in verse 8 it says if you don't do that you're worse than an unbeliever. The family has the first responsibility to take care of widows before they're ever put on the church's list of responsibility. It starts with your own family. Let you...let them first and that first is an adverb in time, priority, the first thing before you do anything else is to show and practice your godliness to your own family. And how do you practice your godliness to your own family? By caring for those in your family who have need. As a general principle, you know you could just preach on that for weeks. The family is the context where true spirituality is revealed.

In chapter 3, for example, an elder had to rule his own house well and have his children in submission with seriousness. A deacon, verse 12, had to have his own children and his own house under control. The home is the proving ground of godliness. And he says if there's any widow who has children or grandchildren, let them practice first of all their godliness in their family. They have a responsibility to care for that widow, that woman who has lost her husband. You claim to be godly, you claim to be reverent, don't tell me how many Bible studies you go to, don't tell me how much theology you know, tell me first that you demonstrate in your family your godliness.

Let's look at that as a general thought. Young people, you say you're godly and you're growing and you're studying the Bible and you're going to Bible studies and you're going to ministry, that's fine but first show me your relationship to your parents. Show me how you treat your mother. Show me how you treat your father. Sisters, show me how you treat your brother, brothers, show me how you treat your sister and I'll show you where your godliness lies. Mother, show me how you treat your children, father, how you treat your wife, and so it goes, right? The family is the proving ground. And don't tell me about your godliness, first put it on display in your family. First, show your godliness at home in

the house before you make a speech about it anywhere else.

I've thought to myself that one of the things we ought to do in a seminary application is to ask the mother to write a letter of reference. I don't think we've ever done that, but, Irv, as I think about it, that would be a great idea. What kind of son is this young man? And what are the evidences of godliness that you have seen in the home? We might cut down our applications a bit with such a process but it might be well worth it because that's where godliness is proven, it's proven in the home. Specifically he says in this case, if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them demonstrate first of all their godliness in the home, or in the family, and to give back some return to their parents. That's the phrase. To give back some return to their parents. You are in obligation, so am I. Should the day come that my parents and my mother would be widowed or my parents would be unable to support themselves, it would be my great and happy privilege to return to them a small measure of the tremendous support they gave to me, bringing me into the world and feeding me and clothing me and housing me and loving me and nurturing me and educating me and all the things they did for me. The return on that is a small return, thankfully, for all that they have done for me. What a privilege.

And so, when it comes to the basic responsibility, it starts in the home. And I'm telling you, we're going to see in the future daughters and mothers in some cases and sisters and nieces and aunts and so forth who are going to become bereft of their husband through divorce, desertion, imprisonment, death, and it's up to us as families to demonstrate our godliness in the proper care of those women first of all. If there's no such care available or if the family is unwilling to do that, then the church steps in and then the woman is a true widow, in the sense that she has no means of support. But the initial line of responsibility belongs in the family of that woman. It is a privilege to do that on behalf, certainly, of a mother. I'm always encouraged when I find and meet children who are supporting their widowed mother. That's common in our congregation. Many of you...I know several of our elders whose widowed mothers live with them, that's very common. I grew up in a home where I shared my room with my grandmother who was widowed. I didn't always like that but I didn't always have the right perspective either. But that's an honorable thing. And that's the heart of God, that's compassionate, that's as it ought to be.

You'll notice the end of verse 4 says that is acceptable before God, based upon the fifth commandment of Exodus 20:12. It is acceptable unto God when children honor their parents.

And, you know, even the pagans have this sort of residual law of God in their fallen hearts, don't they? Reading from the Greek culture it was Greek law from the time of Solon that sons and daughters were not only morally but legally bound to support their parents. Anyone who refused that duty lost his civil rights. Aeschines, the Athenian orator, said in one of his speeches, "And whom did our lawgiver condemn to silence in the assembly of the people? And where does he make this clear? Let there be," he says, "a scrutiny of public speakers in case there be any speaker in the assembly of the people who is a striker of his father or mother or who neglects to maintain them or to give them a

home." Demosthenes said, "I regard the man who neglects his parents as unbelieving in and hateful to the gods, as well as to men." And Philo talked about the fact that even old birds take care of their parents because they taught them how to fly. Should humans do less than that?

And we have a responsibility to care for our parents, particularly those widowed ones. I want to close with an illustration. Genesis 45, just a brief look at a man named Joseph. Turn to it for a moment, just to touch a couple of highlights of this account. Genesis 45, you remember, there was a famine in the land of Canaan. Joseph has become the Prime Minister of Egypt. His brothers sold him to slavery wanting him dead, wanting him out of the way because he was his father's favorite. He knows about the famine in his own land and here he is a loving son wanting to assist his father who is in desperate need. So verse 9 of Genesis 45, "Hurry, go to my father, he says. Say to him, Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me, tarry not. Thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, thou shalt be near to me, thou and thy children, thy children's children, thy flocks, thy herds and all that thou hast and there will I nourish thee and there are yet five years of famine, lest thou and thy household and all that thou hast come to poverty." So he says I'm concerned about you, I want you to come down here. There's a famine. I'll put you in Goshen. I'll feed you. I'll nourish you through the five years of famine. I'll care for you as my father.

Chapter 46 verse 26, all the souls that came with Jacob, he heard his son's request and came. They all came. The ones who came out of his loins, the brothers of Joseph and all their wives and thirty...three score and six...which is 66 people, the sons of Joseph also who were born to him were two souls and all the souls of the house of Jacob who came into Egypt were 70. Here comes this huge entourage and they came down to be cared for by a son who wanted to honor his father in his old age.

Chapter 47 verse 7, he took him, even Joseph, took Jacob his father and set him before Pharaoh and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. He took him to meet the president. He not only took care of his financial needs, but he respected him and honored him and brought him to a privileged meeting with the Pharaoh.

Verse 27 of the same chapter, 47, Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, the country of Goshen, they had possessions therein, they grew, they multiplied exceedingly and Jacob lived in the land of Egypt 17 years...17 years. Then he says to his son, "I'm going to die." He gives his son instruction, in chapter 50 is the whole story of the funeral of Jacob which was Joseph's way of honoring him.

Now the point of all that is this. Here's an illustration of a man who honored his parents in obedience to the law of God. And that's essentially what we find in this text. Verse 3 gives a general command to support the widows. Verse 4 takes it right into the home and says it is the responsibility of the children and the grandchildren to take care of their parents and grandparents in a way that is honorable. And we can extend that to the fact that they are to take care of all of those women in special need within

the range of the family and we'll see that unfold in the remaining verses. God has so much more to say to us, this is just introductory and I'm very anxious that the Lord will instruct us in a way that will be practically applicable to the life of our church in the matter of being obedient to this area.

Well we'll leave the next one for next time. Let's pray together.

Father, we are grateful again this morning because we have been taken by Your Spirit into the very presence of the ultimate teacher of the universe, Your own self. And You have taught us words from Your own lips through the inspired pen of Paul. And You have revealed Your compassionate heart for widows and the desire for us as a church to support them when they are really destitute. And You have reminded us that we in the family demonstrate our godliness by how we requite our parents, how we give back some return to those who have given life and nurture to us. Help us, Lord, as individuals to live out these precepts in our own families and as a church to take up the cause of those who are true widows with no resources, no families to support and to do so with joy and the privilege of representing Your heart in their behalf. Thank You for this instruction, Lord, and we know there's so much more to come. Prepare our hearts and our church to receive and to practice that which You have for us. We pray in the name of our dear Savior. Amen.

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