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

Widows in the Church, Part 2
Scripture: 1 Timothy 5:5-8
Code: 54-37

Let's open our Bibles to 1 Timothy chapter 5 and continue our series on the care of widows in the church...a very vital and a very urgent subject.

I mentioned to you last week that I am convinced that we in our society today are going to see a large increase in the number of dependent women, the number of women who will be dispossessed, who will be in deep need and for whom the church is going to become the primary resource. I think that we are seeing now a tragedy in our society. One writer by the name of George Grant calls it "The feminization of poverty." And in his very interesting book called "The Dispossessed," subtitled Homelessness in America, he has a provocative chapter on the true effect of the Feminist Movement. Now you know that the Feminist Movement has as its overt public agenda the liberation of women. What it has brought about is the poverty of women in grave grave measure.

A typical story comes out of George Grant's book, it goes like this. He writes: "Up until eight years ago, Kathy was a traditional homemaker. She had dedicated herself to building a comfortable life with her husband, Jacob, and their son, Aaron. For 22 years she was the epitome of the committed and caring wife, mother and housekeeper. She had a good life. But then one day Kathy's whole world caved in. Aaron her son was killed in a tragic automobile accident and Jacob took to drink for consolation. `We were both devastated, of course, but Jake just never seemed to recover. He went deeper and deeper into his own dark little world and just shut me out,' she told me. `We became strangers.' Three months after the accident, Jacob sold the family's small electrical supply business and two weeks after that he filed for divorce. `I just couldn't believe what was happening to us,' Kathy said. Grief upon grief.

"But that wasn't even the half of it. The judge awarded Kathy an equal property settlement but she was unable to demonstrate that Jacob had any other assets than the three flat Brooklyn brownstone that had been their home for ten years. He had a fantastic lawyer and they were able to shelter the business assets. `I didn't get a dime,' she lamented, `and since New York has a no fault divorce law, I wasn't entitled to any alimony.' Suddenly at age 43, Kathy Tantebaum(?) was alone. She had no job, no job history, no job skills, no job leads, no job references, nothing. Her share from the sale of the brownstone came to just under $45,000. But after paying her half of the back debts, she was left with a mere $39,000. With that she was to start a new life.

"Kathy immediately moved into a small onebedroom apartment and went to work as a waitress in a Brooklyn kosher deli. She made about $900 a month including tips. Jacob, meanwhile, had quit drinking, gone back to the electrical supply business and remarried. His annual income returned to his predivorce level, nearly $65,000 a year and he and his young new wife purchased a home in the Long Island suburbs. `I'll admit it right off, I became very bitter at that point, very bitter. Why he should have been able to just pick up and carry on as if nothing had happened just escaped me. Yes indeed,' she said, `I was bitter.'

"Then she began to drink for consolation. `At first it was just a bit of sherry at night, but before long I was hitting the bottle pretty hard.' When her work began to suffer, Kathy sought psychiatric help. `The doctor gave me some tranquilizers and listened to me ramble but he never gave me anything tangible, he never really gave me any help. I just decided to hell with it, to hell with it all.'

"I met Kathy in the Riverside Clinic, a rehabilitation center in New York's upper west side that specializes in indigent women. `I just woke up one day in a Welfare hotel and realized that I was on the road to becoming one of those shopping bag ladies. I was out of money. I'd lost my apartment and my job. I was a total mess. I thought...what's a nice Jewish girl like me doing in a place like this? I decided then and there I was going to get the help I needed and somehow I was able to...I was going to be able to rebuild my life.'

"She checked herself into the Riverside program and began the long and arduous task of returning to the mainstream. `I'm still bitter and that's something I'll have to continue to deal with. I know that it was my own responsibility that got me into trouble, the alcohol and all. But even so, it seems to me that women have been led down the Primrose Path...we fought so hard to be liberated, to be equal. And here to find out all that liberation has only earned us more pain and more heartache. I wish to God that...well, I wish that I'd just known then what I know today, I feel used.'

"Martin Latalia(?), the director of the Riverside Clinic, told me, says Grant, that indeed Kathy had been used. `Fifty years ago,' he said, `a situation like a Kathy's simply could not have existed. But the social revolution ushered in by the women's movement equalized our institutions and expectations to such a degree that virtually all the social support systems designed to protect women were removed. You could almost say that feminism has actually backfired.'"

The point that Grant makes in this section of his book is that instead of liberating women, the Feminist Movement has literally devastated women. Economist Sylvia Ann Hewlett(?) has argued in her groundbreaking critique titled "A Lessor Life" the myth of women's liberation in America that quote: "Modern American women suffer immense economic vulnerability. They have less economic security than their mothers did. A bevy of serious papers, articles and books have shown beyond any shadow of a doubt that feminism has done much more harm than good. It has broken down traditional family structures. It has contributed to epidemic irresponsibility. It has diminished courtesy, respect, and

commitment. It has opened a Pandora's Box of social ills, not the least of which is the progressive impoverishment of the very women it was supposed to liberate."

Now to sum that up, the evidence of the feminization of poverty everywhere comes in some statistics. Seventy percent of today's women in the labor force work out of economic necessity. More often than not, they are single, widowed, or divorced. And more often than not, they are poor. Seventyseven percent of this nation's poverty is borne by women and their children. The number of poor families headed by men has declined over the last 15 years by more than 25 percent. Meanwhile, the number of women who headed families at the poverty level or lower has increased nearly 40 percent. Thus today, one in three families headed by women is poor, compared with one in ten headed by men, and one in nineteen with two parents.

The point of all of this is to let you know that with women's liberation has come female poverty. When you have the liberation of woman alongside the liberation of everybody from marriage commitment, you have women being thrown out of marriages and left to fend for themselves everywhere. According to the thirteenth annual report of the President's National Advisory Council on Economic Opportunity, I'm quoting: "If the proportion of the poor among female householder families continues at the speed that it's going now, the poverty population will be composed solely of women and their children before the year 2000." Women are being dispossessed. They are being left alone. Therefore they don't want children. The only way to deal with unwanted children in a society where they're reaching out for every relationship they can find is to abort those children. And the Centers for Disease Control tell us now that abortion has reached the place where it is the sixth leading killer among maternal diseases. And according to the May, 1985 issue of OB/GYN, obstetrics and gynecological journal, they estimate that 50 percent of the deaths related to abortion are not reported so it's double whatever the statistics indicate. Women are victims of abortion in incredible ways. Not only death, pelvic abscess, perforation of the uterus and other internal organs, medical complications in abortion include sterility in as many as 25 percent of all women having abortions. Hemorrhaging occurs in ten percent of all cases requiring transfusions. Viral hepatitis, cervical laceration, cardial respiratory arrest, acute kidney failure, amnionic fluid embolus, and it goes on and on like that.

The result of this is medical care for men has gone up 12 percent in the last few years. Medical care for women has gone up nearly 30 percent. So what we have now are a rising population of dispossessed women who have to run their own life and their own family, earn their own living, take care of their own medical needs. And in the process of doing that, pay more money than men do for medical care because of the problem of abortion. Such is the cost of feminism, the loss of health, the loss of financial stability, the loss of care.

Since 1960 the number of women in the work force has doubled. Fortyfive percent of the entire labor force of the United States is now female and they still earn an average of $10,000 a year less than men. And, get this, the average four year college graduate female in the working place earns the

same amount or less as a male high school drop out. Now I'm not saying that's right, I'm just saying that's fact. What they have worked to get they haven't gotten, and what they didn't expect to get they got. Demanding equality has backfired. Employees won't pay women as much because of day care center costs, because of maternity leave, because of sick child absences. And 45 percent of the women in the work force are single, divorced, separated or widowed. And they're the only person to care for themselves and their children.

And women's liberation and women's equality and everybody saying "take care of yourself, baby," has backfired. You add to that casual recreational sex and illegitimate children and abortion, you add "no fault" divorces which leaves them with no right to alimony and you have the feminization of poverty. And women have become the victims of the second biggest congame in history. The first was when the serpent persuaded Eve she needed to upgrade her life and be equal to God. The second is when the serpent deceived woman into thinking she needed to upgrade her life and be equal to man. Women will never be equal to man, nor will men be equal to women. They're just different.

According to Lenore Whitesman in her book "The Divorce Revolution," the unexpected social and economic consequences for women and children in America, she writes, "On the average, divorced women and the minor children in their households experience a 73 percent decline in their standard of living in the first year after divorce." That's devastating...73 percent decline. The former husbands in the first year after divorce experiences a 42 percent rise in the standard of living. He's unloaded all his baggage. And now in 1940, one out of every six marriages ended in divorce. Fifty years later, half of all marriages end in divorce.

Grant closes this chapter on this issue in his book by saying, "Poverty in America has taken on an increasingly feminine face. More and more women than ever are falling through the gaps in society's safety net. Much of the cause for this abominable situation must be laid at the door of the very movements that sought to liberate women, the abortion movement, the careerest movement and the nofault divorce movement. Through them the structures once built into our cultural system designed to protect women have been systematically dismantled. Dire poverty and even homelessness have become inevitable." And then he says this, "The solution to the feminization of poverty and the feminization of homelessness thus does not depend upon the advocacy of feminism. Indeed it cannot. The solution lies with the church. Care for women caught in the clutches of poverty and homelessness, abandonment, widowhood and distress is always a central sign of devotion to God because God cares so much."

I said this last week and I'll say it again. By God's design, women are always to be cared for. Whoever said, "Baby, you're on your own," defied the purpose and plan of God. And what I'm saying in all of this is what we're looking at, people, is a continual explosion of dispossessed, homeless, poor, alone, desolate, needy, nonsupported women. And the burden for all of that is going to come

right to the foot of the church initially because if we are the representation of God in the world, then we need to represent the compassion of God toward those people. And He cares and we have to care as well.

You see, whenever you buy into Satan's lies and deceptions, you never get what you think you're promised. All you get is tragedy. So Paul, writing to Timothy and for us as well, sets in order the responsibility of the church for the care of dispossessed women who are in need.

Let's be reminded that the first guideline he gave came in verse 3. Look at your outline and we'll just kind of look at the first and second point this morning. The obligation of the church to support widows...the first point he makes, the obligation of the church to support widows comes in verse 3. "Support...the word honor means to support, not only respect but financial support, every kind of support...support widows." You remember I told you the word "widow" doesn't mean necessarily a woman who is alone because of the death of her husband, it only means a woman who is alone. It just is bereft, having suffered loss, having been robbed. It's a woman without a husband...whether it was through death or desertion or divorce or separation or whatever. So it says, "Support those women who are alone when they are really alone."

In other words, when they are widows indeed they have no means of support. It doesn't mean that you are to support a woman who has the resources. And there are some women who have been left alone, they have enough to live on, they have maybe more than enough to live on. Those are not the issues here. The issue here are those women who are widows indeed, that is real widows, that is really destitute, really alone, really without support, in need of care. The church's first responsibility then is to support them. When I say the church, I'm not talking about the church as an organization or a structure, I'm talking about you and me, we have that responsibility. It's not just our responsibility to vote to do that and to take money out of a budget to do that, it's our responsibility as individuals to do that, as we shall see. We are to support those women who are in need.

Now we have a second point here that is very very urgent. And that is the obligation of the church to evaluate the women needing that support. Which of these really millions of women that we look at now across America who have need, which of them are we responsible to take care of? We have to be cautious with this stewardship. And the Spirit of God gives us criteria by which we can evaluate our action.

First of all, responsibility belongs in the family. Look at verse 4. "If any bereft woman, any woman who is alone, has children or grandchildren, let them learn first to show their godliness in the home and to return to their parents." That is to return support to their parents who supported them when they were young. That is good and acceptable before God. That's what the fifth commandment required in Exodus 20, "Honor your father and mother," and that means support them when they need that. So it starts in the family. The family of children and grandchildren are responsible for the support of a

widowed mother. That's how you return your debt of love. That's how you demonstrate your gratitude. That's how you show your godliness in the home. That's how you obey the Word of God. That's how you fulfill the fifth commandment. That's how you do what is acceptable to the Lord. So responsibility starts in the church but it starts with the individual child or grandchild in the church in the care of his parents or grandparents.

So, the first thing we know then is that responsibility for support of bereft women comes to the children of those women. Now that deals with one group of them, one category. And we are responsible to care for them. I'm responsible to care in the event of the widowhood of my mother, for her. That's an obligation. Or my wife's mother, as well, to come to the aid of her in the time of her need should she have need and depend upon my support. That is the first introduction that he makes to the criteria. If you have a widowed mother or grandmother, that's your responsibility.

Now notice verse 5. And he digs a little more deeply into some of the criteria related to supporting widows. Remember verse 3, we only are required to support true widows, just the true widow, the widow indeed. Verse 4, not the one who has children and grandchildren supporting her. That's the first line of responsibility. And that's where support begins.

Now he goes on to define a widow indeed. The one in verse 4 is really not a widow indeed. She has support from her children and grandchildren. But he says in verse 5, "She that is a widow indeed," that is she doesn't have children or grandchildren or she doesn't have children and grandchildren who are willing to care for her, "she is a bereft woman," and it adds, "desolate." Now we're talking about the woman with no family structure. This is the kind of woman, frankly, we're going to see more and more of in the days ahead...the woman who through the casual sex relationships, through the multiple marriages has really no intimate relationships at all. In fact, those who once were a part of her family by marriage have now moved on to the next wife, to attach their affection to her and left this one alone. This is the kind of woman we'll see in the future. Maybe the kind of woman whose children were illegitimate children or whose children have long ago abandoned her to the kind of life that the world dictate she live...and so forth.

So here is this kind of woman. Or there are some cases where a woman may have no children or her children have gone to heaven, they've died, or they've died and gone to hell. Maybe they were unbelieving children. Or they've departed, or whatever. But she's destitute. She has no children. She is what the text says is a real widow who has been left alone...no family, no family in the sense of children and grandchildren. The verb here "has been left alone" monoo, we get the word mono which means single, is in the perfect tense and it means a continual condition or state or permanent position of being forsaken without resources. So when you come across this widow indeed who has been totally left without resources, we have a responsibility to her.

But here are the criteria...are you ready for this? Verse 5, "She trusts in God." Now the Greek text says elpizo, the verb "she has fixed her hope on God." She has fixed her hope on God. That's also a perfect tense. She not only is in a continual condition of being without means but she is in a continual condition of presenting herself to God as her only hope. Her settled condition is one of desolation. Her settled attitude is one of hope in God.

What does that tell us? She's a Christian. What kind of widows is the church responsible to support? Number one, those who have no children or grandchildren who are supporting them. Two, a widow who is a believer...a single woman having lost her husband who is a believer. If she's never had a husband and is single, she is still the care of her father. That's another issue. But this woman is the woman who has no one to care for her and she has fixed her hope on God. She trusts in the God who has promised to care for widows, the God who has entrusted Himself to her to be her support when she has no support. This means she's a Christian lady. Only...now get this...only to suchwomen does the church have this special responsibility. We may choose to help nonChristian women, we must help Christian women. This is a mandate. We might choose to do good to all men, specially those of the household of faith. We are bound to serve the Christian woman who is destitute. She looks to God for the supply of her needs.

Based upon the promise of God that He cares for widows, she understands the significance of Jeremiah 49:11 where God says, "Let thy widows trust in Me." She understands the wonderful and beautiful story of 1 Kings, turn to it for a moment, chapter 17 which gives an illustration of the heart of God toward widows. First Kings 17 and verse 8, "The Word of the Lord came to Elijah and said, Arise, get these to Zarephath which belongs to Sidon and dwell there, behold I have commanded a widow there to sustain you." He says I have commanded a widow to take care of you. "He rose and went to Zarephath and when he came to the gate of the city, behold the widow was there gathering sticks and he called to her and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel that I may drink. And as she was going to fetch it he called to her and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thy hand." He sounds a little bit bossy to me, a little callous except for the fact that this all under the plan of God. The widow is picking up a few sticks to make a fire. And he says, "Could you get me something to drink? Could you get me something to eat?" She doesn't debate that or argue with that. Women had always exchanged their service for the care of men.

And she said, "As the Lord thy God lives..." so she knew who he was, and that she was to care for him. "I have not a cake," she means a biscuit, "I have a handful of meal in a barrel and a little oil in a cruse and I am gathering two sticks that I may go in and prepare it for me and my son that we may eat it and die." We just have one last little bit of supply to make one meal very sparse that we will eat and then we will die of malnutrition.

"And Elijah said to her, Fear not, go and do as thou hast said, but make me of it a little cake first and bring it to me and afterward make for you and your son, for thus says the Lord God of Israel, the

barrel of meal shall not be used up, neither shall the cruse of oil fail until the day the Lord sends rain upon the earth. And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah and she and he in her house did eat for many days and the barrel of meal was not used up, neither did the cruse of oil fail according to the Word of the Lord which He spoke by Elijah."

He said, you take what you have and give it to me and God will fill that thing up every day, and what you take out will be replenished miraculously. And that is exactly what happened. And the point is, God takes care of widows...a gracious really stupendous miracle on behalf of this dear lady and the need of her own life and her son. She was a single parent and God came to the rescue of a single parent who trusted in Him. Here was a woman in Zarephath who believed God. She had very little but when told to give a portion of that little that she had to God, she gave it. Her hope was fixed on God. And when the prophet said, "If you trust God, He'll keep giving to you," she lived in that hope. So here is the kind of widow that is to be supported.

We are to come to the aid of a woman who trusts in God...a believing woman, a godly woman. And her godliness is seen in the next phrase. "She continues in supplication and prayers night and day." The fact that she had fixed her hope on God shows that she's a Christian, the fact that she continues day and night in prayer and supplication shows that she's a committed Christian, a godly woman...not just a saved woman but a godly woman.

Apparently we could also conclude that this kind of woman is really not committed to remarriage, she's committed to God. She's not on some kind of hot trail to find the next guy, she's just put her hope in God, if that's on God's agenda that's fine, if that's not, she's accepting that. Whatever God provides, she is a woman of virtue...a woman who loves God and a woman who continues in supplications and prayers night and day is a woman who not only loves God but has an intimate ongoing relationship with Him. She's abiding in Him, remaining in constant petition and devotion before the Lord.

Now the continuing means just that...all the time. The supplications, deesis, means requests, petitions. And she's petitioning God about her needs. She's telling God her needs. She's telling God that He's her supplier, that she is in dependence on Him.

The word prayers is a general word, it means communion, worship, thanks, praise. So she's not just begging, she's not just petitioning, she's petitioning on the one hand and praising on the other hand. She's asking on the one hand and adoring on the other hand. She's wanting on the one hand and worshiping on the other hand. She really walks and talks with the living God with a heart of hope and a heart of trust and a heart of love. She does it night and day. That's a very Jewish phrase, I wish we had time we could trace it through the New Testament. It simply means all the time, whether at night or during the day. It doesn't mean 24 hours all night, all day, it simply means whether it was in the day time or at the night time, she would be petitioning and she would be praying. A godly woman. This is

the widow indeed that is worthy of the care of the church, the care of the body of Christ.

This kind of woman is seen in Luke chapter 2. Do you remember her? Her name was Anna and she was there at the dedication of the baby Christ, the child Christ, when He was brought to the temple. "And there was one Anna," Luke 2:36 says, "a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser, she was of great age and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity." She would have been married very young, no doubt in her teens, she lived seven years with her husband and her husband died. "And she had never departed from the temple but served God with fastings and prayers...there it is...night and day." She had the privilege of being there when the Messiah Himself arrived and was dedicated in the privilege of going out and speaking of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Israel.

Here was a woman who lost her husband and devoted herself to God. This is a woman worthy of support. If God wanted to give her a husband, that's fine. If God wanted her to be remaining single, that's fine. Her heart was given to God. And yes she poured out her petition, and yes she poured out her supplication, but also with it her praise and her thanks and her adoration and her worship. It's that kind of woman who is a widow indeed...the church is to care for. And when I say the church, again I say it is not the institution, it is the individual who is the church. Rather than bringing it to the attention of someone else, what can you do? You're the church. The church becomes the channel for God's supply to that kind of woman.

And may I add that the idea here is not to set up some standard and say to a woman, "Well now that you're a widow, if you'll just get your spiritual act together we'll support you." The idea here is not to set up criteria which women can now try to meet, the idea is to identify the kind of woman who already honors God and is dependent on God and who lives in an intimate relationship with the living God and say that's the kind of woman we want to support. The church then becomes the channel to support that kind of women.

I don't believe we are responsible to support all the...all the widowed women, all the bereft women, all the single women, all the single parents that are running around having lost their husband who are poor and destitute. I don't think that the Bible says that the church has the responsibility to support all of them because I believe personally that the text is absolutely clear when it says the widows who are widows indeed are to be honored and the widow indeed is the one who is a Christian and in godly communion with the living God. That's our responsibility. We may choose to help others. We are mandated to care for these.

And to show you how specific it is, look at verse 6. "But, on the other hand is what that means, on the other hand, she...that is that bereft woman, that single woman who has now lost her husband...who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives." The Greek says the living for pleasure one living is dead. In other words, the one who goes out and lives for her own ease and all she wants is her own

satisfaction and her own indulgence, she may be living physically but she is dead...what? Spiritually. There are women like that. They have no family. They have to go out and support themselves but they don't trust God for that. They don't hope in God for their guidance. They don't depend on God. They have no heart of devotion to Him, no love for Him, no dependence on Him, no desire to obey Him. But rather they live for pleasure. Now that Greek term means to live sensually. Some have translated...it's a very rare verb, spatalao, it means to plunge into dissipation. It means to lead a life of wanton pleasure. The word wanton means with disregard for what is right. To lead a life of pleasure with no thought for what is right or what is wrong.

I read yesterday in the Newsweek magazine about the death of a woman named Maria who died a horrible, absolutely frightening death of AIDS. And all the time she was dying wondering why this could happen to such a nice person like her and all through the article the whole tone of the article was to say this woman was such a wonderful woman, how could this be happening, and everybody was crying and weeping over such a terrible death. And the truth...the whole story line was it was so hard for her and her livein lover Ricky to deal with this. Well, anybody who had a livein lover ought to thank God they hadn't died a worse death.

And then it went on to say what they really found was she got AIDS because she used to have relationships with a drug addict. Nice lady. This is the lady of virtue who is a victim of AIDS? Believe me, be sure your sins will find you out. This is a lady of virtue in twentieth century America...poor victim. I feel sorry for her. I'm not saying I don't. I feel sorry for her eternally. But I'll tell you, it is a fool's paradise to think you can live any way you want and then wonder why it all turns out so bad.

But when you have a woman who chooses in her singleness, and she was married, this Maria, and she chooses to live abandon to pleasure, she is spiritually dead while she's alive. And the implication here is you don't have any right or any privilege or any opportunity or any responsibility in regard to her needs to provide any supply. Not that woman.

Why? There's a sense in which you want to leave them to the consequence of their own sin. You don't want to alleviate the consequence that God has brought into their own life, the consequence which may drive them to a desperation that becomes repentance. The term here, plunges into dissipation, leads a life of wanton pleasure, living in pleasure, whatever, gives the idea of abandonment to comfort, selfindulgence or pleasure. It is used in Ezekiel 16 about verse 49 in the Septuagint which is a Greek translation of the Old Testament, and it is translated there "careless ease." It means unbridled sensuality. This describes the typical unregenerate single woman today who has lost her husband one way or another and she's just out there hopping from guy to guy, bed to bed, doing her thing, worldly, selfindulgent. She's alive physically but she is dead spiritually. She can make no claim on the church, no claim on the church individually or as an institution.

Now it's likely because of the context here that such women existed in that church, that when their husband was around they were active in the church. When the husband died or when the husband disappeared, they split and went into that kind of life style. Whatever their past involvement in the church, they forsook it. They were the rocky soil where the plant grew for a little while and then it died. They were the weedy ground where it grew for a little while and then was choked out by the love of lustful desire and the pleasures of the world. For that woman the church needs to provide nothing. She needs to be turned over to the consequence of her own choices.

And so, I do not believe the church is under obligation according to the Word of God to be running around helping ungodly women continue to live their ungodly life. But I do believe we are obligated by God to show His compassion toward those obedient and chaste and lovely women who are in need but whose hearts are given to God and whose life is marked by obedience and prayer. Not the other kind.

I remember a couple in our church, very active in our church, very active. The husband died tragically and the woman just went immediately into a life of wanton pleasure. And some people asked me at the time, "What are we going to do about that?" And I didn't even know what 1 Timothy taught in depth like I do now, but I said I don't think we ought to do anything about that. I don't believe we have an obligation to support a person who has chosen to walk away from the things of God. Yes the church is responsible to care for women, yes the women are responsible to be worthy to be cared for. Both sides of it.

Paul doesn't even command it, it's so obvious in verse 6. He just states it. The ones who live in pleasure are dead while they live. He doesn't say don't support them, that's obvious. We're not going to support spiritually dead people. We don't use Kingdom resources to do that.

There's a sense in which, and I want to be...I want you to understand this, I don't want to be ungracious in saying it... there's a sense in which the whole wretched system of man's world has built in consequence to its deviations. You understand that? People ask me all the time, "Do you think AIDS is a judgment of God?" Of course it's a judgment of God...of course it is, that's obvious. It's a result of sin. Not everybody who has it deserves to have it but it has come about as a result of man's sin. Do you believe poverty is the result of sin? Yes, the feminization of poverty is a result of a fight against the way God designed men and women to live and the consequences are built right in. You don't have to crusade against that, we don't have to crusade against feminism. You don't see me crusading against feminism, marching on City Hall, carrying placards, writing books, doing my thing on feminism. Why? Because built into any deviation from the truth of God is the seeds of its own destruction. It's all in there. So you just keep moving down the track of biblical truth and divine truth. And the church does not need to take up all causes and all issues, it needs to teach the Word of God and to be sure that when it does support those in need, the ones it supports are worthy of support. And the ones not worthy of support are left without support so that they can deal with the

consequence of their own sin. Hopefully in their own misery will be driven to the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Notice verse 7, "And these things command that they may be blameless." What are these things? Everything he said since verse 3. You command this to your people, Timothy, that they might be without blame, whether they are families who ought to support widows, or whether they are widows who ought to live godly lives. He's pulling everybody in...everybody involved should be above reproach. The church should be above reproach. The church should be a model of virtue in this area leaving no legitimate fault to be exploited by the critics. Frankly, the reputation of the church is at stake in this issue.

You know, I guess maybe this is...maybe you feel like I do but this gets to me so much. Millions upon millions upon millions of dollars in the name of Christianity are being pumped into massive overdone, overembellished monuments to men and there are myriads of people with profound needs whose needs go unmet while we pad our own pockets...building our quasi Christian evangelical Disneylands where we can overentertain already overindulged saints. And you and I have to be careful, we may be building our own little Disneyland, too, with all of our little worldly accoutrements.

But the idea...do you realize...can you perceive what the world sees when it looks at Christianity and sees all these people with solid gold Rolex watches and Rolls Royces and massive accumulations of wealth and huge empires and all of this kind thing while people are destitute...even the people who somehow identity with the church but never seem to get any of the benefit? Al they get the privilege of doing is paying for everything that indulges these overindulged people. When does the church back up? I think about the fact that we built and furnished this auditorium for $750,000 and every time I'm given a chance, I tell people that. They can't believe that. But you don't see a lot of holy hardware hanging all over the place either. Well, all we wanted was a place to hear the Word of God, we don't want to spend a fortune on the environment, we'd rather have our resources go to the people. I'll be so glad when we get this thing done with the balcony and that thing over there...that education building done because I think the future years of this church are going to demand that our dollars, after God has allowed us to build the facility here to do the work, they're going to turn out and they're going to start to touch the lives of people in need and we're already doing that even now.

But Paul says in verse 7 the reputation of the church is at stake and if the church is to be blameless, then you better be commanding these things all the time. You tell your people they're responsible for caring for widows, widows who are widows indeed, that is without support and who are godly and who walk with the Lord, have manifested their dependence and hope in Him through a life of prayer. If the church is careful and makes these distinctions and supports these women, it will be above criticism, it will gain a marvelous and wonderful reputation.

Verse 8, and he wraps up his second point with this statement. It's a very familiar verse, "If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his own family...oikos...he is denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." That's one of the strongest statements in the whole Bible. You say, "I didn't think a Christian could be worse than a nonChristian." Yeah you can. In terms of the expression here, you are worse than an unbeliever if you don't take care of your own.

Now what is he saying here? There's no break in thought. The term "but" keeps the same flow going, the break comes in verse 9, and we'll pick that up next week. But he states in verse 8 negatively what he said in verse 4 positively. In verse 4 he said, first of all, children take care of your parents. Now in verse 8 he says if you don't you're worse than an unbeliever. But he goes beyond parents here and he gives us more criteria to evaluate our responsibility. The fact that he said it in verse 4 in a positive way, and now says it in verse 8 in a negative way, leads me to believe that there were a lot of violations of this in Ephesus and the level of Paul's exasperation was rising and rising because so many people were violating the biblical ethic toward women in need. So he says, "If anyone doesn't provide for his house," and it's a firstclass condition and that means it states a fact, so it could be translated, "When any of you doesn't provide for your family...or...since some of you are not providing for your family..." It's a very simple statement of fact. If you don't provide, and that is pronoeo, to think before, to plan before, to care for someone, to take thought to help, if you're not planning into your life the care of your own...your own what?...your own widows.

Now what does he mean your own widows? That's very vague and it is purposely vague because it refers to anybody networked with you in your family...not specifically because that comes next...but in your circle of relationships, maybe your relatives, maybe your friends, maybe your neighbors, maybe your acquaintances, anybody networked in life through you whether in your house or another house, it's purposely vague. And again I say, it isn't the question of the organized church doing it, it's the question of a believer doing it. And many people will come to me and they will say the church ought to help this lady, she needs $200. Why can't the church help her? Well we want to do everything we can but if you say that to me I'm liable to say back to you, "Why can't you help her?" And if you say to me I can't help her because I don't have anything either, then we'll help both of you gladly. But don't come and expect the church to do what you won't do. That's not the idea. Where do you...who do you think the church is? If you have a burden for someone, then the responsibility lies with you to do what you can to see that that burden is alleviated.

So, first of all, if you don't provide for your own, that is the widows that are in your network, the bereft women that you know of, and especially of those of his own family. So we know the first phrase is beyond family, especially of your own family, he says if you don't help the ones in your network and especially in your own family, your own parents or grandparents, or your own aunt, or your own sister, or whatever, someone close to you, if you don't help those along with everyone networked who in any sense belongs to you as a friend or an acquaintance, you are guilty of two things. Look at the first one, you've denied the faith. Now he doesn't mean you personally have lost your personal faith in

God. He doesn't mean that. He's not judging your soul. What he means is, you deny the biblical principle of compassionate love that is the very center of the Christian faith. God so loved the world that He...what?...gave. And that's the heart of the Christian faith. The love of Christ is shed abroad in our hearts, Romans 5:5. By this shall all men know that you're My disciples, you have love one for another. Paul writes the Thessalonians and says, "You don't have any need for a man to teach you how to love, you're taught of God to love one another." The heart of the Christian faith is compassionate love, compassionate care, compassionate support. Christianity at its very heart is that.

And so, if you have widows in the network of your relationship, or bereft women who are alone and without resources and particularly in your own family, and you do not support them, you have denied the heart of the Christian faith. I don't care what else you're doing. I don't care how many Bible studies you're teaching or how many classes you go to or how many songs you sing. Life at its basic unit is an act of love toward someone in need.

So, first you've denied the faith and if you've denied the faith, secondly, you're worse than an unbeliever. In practice you've denied the faith. In practice you look worse than an unbeliever. Why? Because most unbelievers take care of their own. I mean, most pagans know that. And most unbelievers have no idea of the obligation of love that God has given, they just do it naturally. And most unbelievers have no real model to follow since they don't know Christ. And most unbelievers, obviously all unbelievers, don't have the power to love that we have. So we have the mandate, we have the model and we have the power and if we don't come up to the level of an unbeliever in caring for someone in need, then we're worse than they are. That's the point. Even pagans revere their ancestors and worship their elders. And the Christian who falls below that basic standard of loving provision is more to be blamed than anybody is to be blamed by him because of what he knows, the command he's under and the love he possesses.

So, Paul says to start with you have an obligation to honor widows with your support and you have an obligation in looking at the widows to be supported to make sure that they meet the criteria, that is they have no personal source of support on their own, they have no means of care, they have no one who will provide for them. There's nothing in here at all that says they're to provide for themselves, go off and do their own thing. But if they have some provision that is made for them, or if their resources are adequate enough that have been left to them, or whatever, you don't need to take care of them. But if they have no resources, if they are Christians and if they are deeply committed to walking with God, they are your responsibility. It starts with you.

To pull this together, let's look at John 19. And this is a fitting illustration to conclude this morning. In John 19 Jesus is hanging on the cross, it is near death that we find Him. And gathered at the foot of the cross are His mother, and His mother's sister who was Salome and Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene. In verse 26, "When Jesus therefore saw His mother and the disciples standing by

whom He loved...that's John the writer of this gospel who never uses his own name but always calls himself the disciple Jesus loved...He said to His mother, Woman, look, your son." He wasn't calling her attention to Him, he was calling her attention to John because He then said to the disciple, "Look, your mother. And from that hour, that disciple took her unto his own house." Literally unto his own. She became his. Why? Because women were to be cared for. Jesus didn't say on the cross, "Mom, get a job."

I want you to understand this. John was the son of Salome, Salome was very likely the sister of Mary so John was a nephew of Mary, John the beloved, John the tender but John the strong as well. To him Jesus commits His mother. Why? Joseph is long dead, he has disappeared from the pages of the gospel record. And Mary was alone as far as a husband is concerned. She had now lost the son of her love, the Son of promise, the Son of virgin birth, the Messiah, the Christ who was born to her loins. She was left only with His unbelieving brothers. She did not want to be in the care, no doubt, of those unbelieving brothers. And so in loving compassion, Jesus commits her to the care of John and John to take care of her. And I want you to know, this tells us something absolutely monumental about the importance of what we're learning. Jesus hanging on a cross only spoke to two individuals, one was a vile wretched criminal hanging next to Him, a thief, a sinner bound for hell whom Jesus forgave and took to heaven...the other was His widowed mother and made sure of her care. Nothing...and listen to this carefully...nothing more reveals the heart of God then when Jesus Christ is dying on a cross bearing the sins of the whole world, gathering all of eternity past and future into one great redemptive climax that the two things that preoccupy His mind are the salvation of one sinner and the care of one widow. Very important...very important. There is the heart of God, a heart of compassion toward sinners and those women in need.

When Jesus said to her, "Woman," He said woman because He didn't want to say "mother" and drive the sword deeper into her heart, He didn't want to say "mother" because from now on He was to be her Savior, not really her son. She was to be related to Him spiritually, not physically. And though He was doing the most strenuous inconceivable work ever done, He never lost the attention of the compassionate heart that beat within Him, the very heart of God, to care for a widow. Now that tells you something very important. The church is not only to be involved in redeeming, in seeing the redeeming of sinners, but in seeing the support of women left alone. Our society has lied and deceived us in regard to the care of women to the point where even the church has bought into this. And I say again, the deceit has built into it the seeds of its own destruction. And we stand firm on the Word of God.

What does it all mean? It means that we have an obligation to care for those desolate women who have suffered loss. First of all in our own families, in the network of our own friends, in our own household. And if there's no such household, no such place, then collectively as a church body we provide resources for such women. But let it begin with us as individuals. There is no church but you and me. We cannot do collectively what we will not do individually. The responsibility is ours.

Father, again we confess to You that these things sometimes are hard to hear because we are selfish. We are preoccupied with our own indulgences. We resist getting involved in the complexities of people with needs. Forgive us, forgive me. Make us faithful to have the heart of Christ who in bearing the sins of the world and accomplishing something so monumental was concerned about where His mother slept that night and where she would get her next meal, for those dear women had followed Him and He had provided for them. Help us to take up the cause of Christ, to provide for women in need. There's so much more to learn. Open our hearts to all You have to teach us and make us faithful to obey, in Christ's name. Amen.

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