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

Widows in the Church, Part 4
Scripture: 1 Timothy 5:11-16
Code: 54-39

As you know, we've been studying 1 Timothy chapter 5 verses 3 through 16, and the subject of this section is the care of widows, or women who have their husband in the church. I just want to remind you of some preliminary things before we look at the passage in specific in order to try to set some things in your mind and pick up any loose ends you might have as we come to part four of this series. The underlying reality unstated in the text but really there by implication is the fact that God has designed women as the weaker vessel. God has designed women to be cared for, provided for, protected, nurtured, cherished by men. And as I said last time, the biblical community, both Old Testament and New Testament, assumed that a woman was under the care of her father until she was handed over to the care of her husband. Women were to be provided for and cared for because they were the weaker vessel. They needed someone stronger than they to care for them.

It's not a question of spiritual strength, it's not a question of intellectual strength, it's not a question of the strength of character, it's only a question of the physical dimension. Women needed to be provided for, nurtured, protected and cared for. In fact, this comes through in the Old Testament in many ways when Isaiah chapter 19 verse 16 wanted to speak of the weakness of Egypt, it said Egypt is like a woman, emphasizing the fact that Egypt is vulnerable, unprotected and somewhat weak. In Jeremiah twice, once in chapter 50 as God speaks the diatribe against Babylon, in verse 37 he condemns Babylon basically by saying they shall become like women. In other words, when I move against Babylon, they will be in weakness. In Jeremiah chapter 51 and verse 30 similarly, the mighty men of Babylon have foreborn to fight, they have remained in their strongholds. In other words, they won't come out and do battle. Their might has failed, they've became like women. And in that little prophecy of Nahum, the end of the prophecy chapter 3 verse 13 speaking in the prophecy against Nineveh, "Behold thy people in the midst of thee are women."

Now all of those most interesting statements simply point up that there was a very ubiquitous sense that women were the weaker vessel. And when wanting to designate a nation or a people as indefensible and vulnerable, it simply said they were like women. There's nothing wrong with that. There's nothing wrong with being provided for, protected, nourished, cherished and cared for, anymore than there's anything wrong with having to do that as a responsibility. But God has designed men to be the stronger vessel in terms of the physical supply and women to be the ones who being weaker are supplied for. And what a beautiful and wonderful partnership that is.

Now it is true, having said that, that by God's design there are some unique women for whom God has designed a single state. In other words, there are some women who will never marry. In 1 Corinthians, for example, chapter 7 starting in verse 26 and going all the way to verse 35, the Apostle Paul discusses the virtues of being single. Now in that chapter it's obvious that behind the scenes was a group of people lobbying for singleness as the means to greater spirituality and another group in Corinth lobbying for marriage as the path to greater spirituality. In the chapter Paul says neither one is the path to greater spirituality but if you can remain single because of the present distress, referring to persecution, being in a hostile environment where Christians were arrested, beaten and even killed and being ten years away from the reign of terror under Nero, Paul says if you can remain single, if you have that gift and you aren't going to burn in your desire. In other words, if you can handle being single, then that by the design of God is to your benefit. Why? Because a married person has to care for the matters of his wife. He has to care for the matters of his household, of his family and so forth.

But in that particular text both men and women are discussed and the implication there is that there are those men and those women occasionally who have been given the gift of singleness for the very purpose of concentrating on service to Jesus Christ unencumbered by the world and particularly in a time of hostility when there would be grave difficulty in being married because you would not only suffer the potential loss of your own life but you would then leave your family without resource or you might even suffer the loss of family and that has its own burden to bear. So Paul says there is virtue in singleness if indeed that is the design of God.

I might secondly add that there may be some women who are single not because of the design of God in terms of their giftedness and suitability for that, but because perhaps they because of sin have not been the right person, the right woman to meet the right man and so there is an element of chastening in their life. There are many young women who living a life of sin and disobedience to Christ have by God's own judgment and determination forfeited marriage which is the grace of life for women and yet that's withhold from them as a way of God's chastening them. There may be other women who are single not because of some sin in their life, not because of some gift, but because God is allowing that in their life for some perfecting purpose. Perhaps the right person has not come along and there is something on the agenda of God to be accomplished by their continued singleness until that time if indeed it is to come to pass.

Now I say all of that because in the last three weeks in discussing the subject of widows, I have had a large number of single women come to me and say, "Look, I'm single and I don't know where I fit in to 1 Timothy 5." And my stock answer is you don't fit into 1 Timothy 5, you're not discussed there. However, you are discussed in 1 Corinthians chapter 7 and there we find that God has designed singleness for some by giftedness. We can also conclude that disobedience to the Lord could forfeit the blessing of marriage to others and we could conclude just in general that God may restrain a person from marriage for His own purposeful spiritual design which you may or may not know until it's

long accomplished. But the point of this text is to deal with the general truth that God has designed women to be under the care of a man. It is the unusual woman who can live her life long in singleness or who by judgment of God or chastening of God must do so or for some divine purpose God chooses that. The main stream of women, the majority, the general design of God is that women marry and sustain the relationship to a man in which relationship they are cared for, provided for, supported and protected. That is God's general design.

And in general then I would like also to say that apart from that provision and apart from that protection and apart from that fulfillment, women are vulnerable. They are vulnerable and they are unfulfilled and you take those two and put them together and you have a potential disaster. A vulnerable and unfulfilled woman is fair game for many evil intended men.

A woman under the design of God to be fully complemented and made completely whole in a sense by a marriage with a man then finds herself in a difficult and unfilling situation if she has not found that man. It's interesting to me today that the modern cry for women to be free, in fact there's even a Christian book called, "Woman Be Free," for women to be single and pursue their own independence and pursue their own career, really goes against the Godcreated grain of womanhood. And try as they will to parade this kind of mentality, it doesn't seem to fly with the women who are trying to live it out. That's becoming more and more obvious all the time.

For example, modern psychologists are busy right now picking up the pieces of women who are trying desperately to live life without a man. What happens is they are not only a woman but they have to become a man, too. And so they are the one to be provided for, protected and they're having to do the provision and the protection themselves. Secularists are faced then with a disastrous fall out of the supposed liberated woman. Last week in the L.A. Times there was an interesting article on this. Quoting a few of the psychologists and psychoanalysts out of that article really tells you where the problem lies. Annette Barron(?) who is a psychologist here in Los Angeles wrote, "It is a phenomenon of this era that the great majority of psychologists' practice may be two thirds of anybody's practice is single women who have relationship problems." I can understand that. They will have relationship problems because of the high level of vulnerability and their unfulfilled state when God designed them to be under the care of a man.

Kenneth Druck(?), another psychologist in the same article, says, "The average 30yearold woman is coming in for psychoanalysis and counseling because she thinks something is wrong. She has an underlying sense of failure, a nagging suspicion that perhaps she has missed the boat somewhere. The fact is she doesn't have a relationship, she's not part of a family," end quote. And I might add, she has no husband. Janice Liberman(?), a New York psychoanalyst wrote, "These women bring to treatment a hidden agenda to find a husband."

Now the point is all that is being said about liberation just doesn't fly in the heart of a woman. Therapist Pierre Morinell(?) of the University of California at San Francisco, the clinic, said, "That single women in therapy, psychotherapy, often express the need for family and for children. Whether that is due to the reality that you've been out in the trenches and you're bloodied and battered or not, there's something rather profound...listen to this...in their genes that wants to nurture and raise children and have a quieter and simpler life." That sounds pretty biblical to me. He says, "Particularly among his patients are a series of symptoms such as poor concentration, eating and drinking too much, sleep disruption, a general blue view of the world. Taken together the symptomatology points to depression and when you start taking a history, men or the lack of men are one aspect of that history." Isn't that interesting? Secular humanistic psychology is finding out exactly what God says.

Now even when the modern liberated woman finds a man, she can't make a marriage work. Annette Barron says, "You have women who have learned to take care of themselves who have in effect become men. The pieces aren't fitting, it's become skewed. Once she has become a man, then marrying a man just doesn't seem to work." So she wants to marry an equal, not someone she has to serve, so marriage simply becomes a convenience of two people legalizing sex and going on with independent living until the passion dies and when the passion dies without real commitment divorce ensues and they're off for the same cycle again.

And whether or not women want to admit it on the surface, God has designed them for a strong need to have provision and protection given to them by a man in exchange for loving service rendered to that man. That's God's design. And because God is so committed to the care of women, He is concerned greatly about those women who having had a husband lose that husband. And that's the essence of this text. This is the heart of God ministered to these women through the church in the time of their need. He is very concerned about widows, women bereft of a husband. We see that in the Old Testament, we see it through the New Testament as well.

Now remind yourself of one thing. The term is "widow" here and it appears several times in the text. Keep in mind the Greek word is chera and that word means bereft, alone, having been left alone. It has nothing to do with how the woman was left alone. It doesn't necessarily tell us that the man died, such as the English word "widow" does. It simply says this is a formerly married woman who is now alone, whether through death, divorce, desertion, separation or whatever. The term itself does not necessitate a death. So the church then is obligated to take a good look at how it is to care for those women who have now lost their husband through death, divorce, desertion or whatever and are now alone unprotected, uncared for, unprovided for and vulnerable...and I might add even unfulfilled because of God's design.

Now there are several key points, let me remind you of the ones we've already discussed. Point number one in your outline, which you can follow if you want, it's in your bulletin, is the obligation of the church to support such women. Verse 3 says that we are to support those bereft women who are

really alone. Real widows would be those who have no other means of support. Now we don't just blindly rush in to caring for all these women, there is a line of responsibility. So we move to the second point, the obligation of the church to evaluate the women needing that support. We don't support every woman who's lost her husband, we have to make an evaluation. The first line of support comes in verse 4 from children and grandchildren. If any of these women have children or grandchildren, then they should return to their parents a portion of what their parents gave them in their growing up. That is the first line of responsibility belongs to the children and the grandchildren to support the women who are bereft. A widowed mother, a divorced mother, a deserted mother is to be cared for by her children and her grandchildren as a means of demonstrating their loving return of all the investment of that woman in their life. That's the first line of responsibility.

The second line of responsibility we noted was in verse 8, that if any man does not provide for his own, that is his own bereft women. That's generally very vague and it means any that are networked with him, any that are relatives or friends or in the circle of family, extended family, specially those of his own family, immediate household. So the first responsibility, children and grandchildren. The second responsibility, a man who has a bereft woman who has lost her husband within the sphere of his network family, whether it's extended or immediate in the house. First the children and grandchildren, second, some other man...it might be a cousin, it might be an uncle, it might be a brotherinlaw, could be anyone like that. It starts with an individual responsibility.

I pointed out to you also last time that the third line of responsibility will come in verse 16 where it says, "If any believing woman has widows, let her relieve them." So it's not just a man who has means, but even a woman who has lost her husband if she has means or if her husband's not a believer, she has means she can use as she will...maybe he's given her the discretion to do that. She has a responsibility also. First the children and grandchildren, secondly, men in the family, thirdly, women in the family who have means are also responsible to share those means with those women who have lost their husbands.

Then fourthly in the line of responsibility comes the church. We take care of then the widows indeed. Who are they? Those whose children, grandchildren can't or won't support them, those whose men in the family can't or won't support them, those whose women in the family can't or won't support them, they therefore having no means of support are to be cared for by the church. And we must evaluate among those women which are to be cared for, for that we go back to verse 5. A true widow, a desolate one who qualifies for support is one who trusts or has fixed her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. In other words, a godly Christian woman. What of the widows indeed, which ones of the widows indeed is the church to support? The godly ones. The ones in verse 6 who live in pleasure are spiritually dead and the implication there is we have no responsibility for them. And so in verse 7 he says, "Command these things that the church in following these things may be without blame."

So the responsibility then comes to the church when all the areas of responsibility have been exhausted and the church is responsible only to support those women who are Christians and who are godly as evidenced by a life of continual prayer. A woman who lives in dissipation, in pleasure, in sensual desire is spiritually dead. The church has no obligation to care for her. In fact, she is best left to the devices of her own sin which when reaching their climax may awaken her to her need for the Lord and drive her back to things that are right. So those are the first two things that we looked at.

Now last time we looked also at verses 9 and 10. And we said, thirdly, Paul says that the church is obligated to maintain a high standard for those women who serve. And verse 9 and 10 identify for us an order of women in the church, women who had lost their husbands, who were then officially put on a list and given the responsibility of spiritual ministry. Their primary ministry would be defined in Titus 2, teaching younger women how to be godly, love their husbands, love their children, be pure, discreet, chaste, keep the home, and so forth. They would then work with orphans and children. They would work with prisoners, the sick, the poor, the needy, those in trouble, those destitute. They were women who were qualified and you'll notice the qualifications are wonderful, they were to be at least 60 years of age so that they would not have a desire to remarry, they would not be beset by a desire for a conjugal relationship. They were to have given all their life the very clear testimony that they were a oneman woman. In other words, they were ever and always devoted to their husband and having a pure relationship with him. Verse 10, they had a reputation for good works and here are the good works...they had brought up children, loved strangers, washed the saints' feet, assisted the afflicted and troubled and diligently pursued every good work. These kinds of women were to be put on an official list of service.

Now keep this in mind. This is not the kind of widow to be supported. Any woman who is without support was to be supported. But these were women put on a list of those who serve in the church. A wonderful, wonderful ministry as these older women went around having lived lives of godliness teaching other women to live the same kind of life. They were the models of virtue. And they rendered official service in behalf of the Lord's church.

Now notice that the first qualification in verse 9 is they were to be over 60. What about all the rest? Wouldn't there be other women who would want to be on the list of servants in the church? Yes, and we come to them in verses 11 to 15. And here is the obligation of the church to instruct young widows to remarry...to instruct young widows to remarry. Now I want you to know something, I want to give you a footnote right here. If you know me you know I'm not interested in ever giving you my opinion on things in this pulpit. This is not a place for my opinion, this is a place for me to teach you what the Word of God has to say. I'm going to do that, I just want to take you through this passage as the Word of God very clearly lays it out. And if something kind of goes crossgrain to where you might be, your debate is not with me, your debate is with the Word of God and you need to look closely to make sure that we are understanding it properly, if that will help you. But the gist of verses 11 to 15 is a very

simple principle. Young women who have lost their husbands are to remarry. That you cannot miss. Verse 14, "I desire...boulomai, strong word, has the force of a command...that the younger remarry." The younger...literally it says, I desire, or I command that the younger to marry. It doesn't say younger women, we know what younger ones he's talking about. Starting back in verse 11 he mentions the younger widows.

So, he's taking about women who have lost their husband and the biblical text says that I desire them, and the word is boulomai, it is the desire of reason not the desire of emotion, it is the desire of calculated rational thinking. It is the tantamount to a command...I command younger ones to marry.

So the obligation of the church then with those younger widows is to encourage them toward marriage. The church could put widows on a list if they were over 60. Younger widows were encouraged to go toward marriage.

Now you say, "What is the issue here?" Let me give you the picture. Younger women lost their husbands. And immediately in the sorrow of losing your husband, whether he left you through death or whether there was an unbelieving husband who departed because he didn't want to live with a believing wife and that was a very common practice in the early church. Many women believed in the gospel. They were married to pagan husbands. The tension grew so strong. The pagan left. First Corinthians 7:15 says, "If an unbeliever departs, let him depart, a believer is not in bondage." So once that unbeliever said "I can't take this, I will refuse to be married to a Christian" and split, that woman became a bereft woman. She had lost her husband. If she was still young, she was in a situation where biblically she was given the privilege and the right to remarry, based on 1 Corinthians 7:15.

Also, there were those young women whose husbands engaged themselves in sexual sin. And the Lord Jesus in Matthew 5 and also in Matthew 19 says that anyone who divorces for any other grounds than sexual sin creates adultery. The very clear implication is that where you have sexual sin unrepented of and continuous, that is grounds for the dissolution of a marriage. We know that because in the Old Testament economy, that kind of behavior brought about death, didn't it? And death certainly would have been the dissolution of a marriage. If in the new covenant God is gracious and doesn't kill the guilty partner, that should not result in a life long sentence of celibacy to the innocent one. So it is true then in the words of our Lord that where you have an ongoing adultery and sexual sin, there is a grounds for the divorce in that marriage and that means freedom to remarry. Very clearly in Jewish custom and Jewish law and Jewish teaching, younger women who were in the state of having lost their husband legitimately in the sense that they left because they were believers or they left through an adulterous situation or they left through death were in that culture encouraged to remarry.

Why? Because the home was the sphere of a woman's existence. And a woman who lost her husband early in her years would be out there as vulnerable and unfulfilled as a woman who had

never been married and had the same needs.

In Romans chapter 7, obviously, it tells us that when a man dies the marriage union is broken and there is a freedom to remarry. So looking at it from the desertion of an unbeliever, from the fornication of a partner or from the standpoint of death, the Scripture allows the remarriage of that woman. The innocent party in an adultery, the believer left by an unbeliever free to remarry.

So we come then to verse 11. And here's what would happen. One of these young women would lose their husband. Maybe he died, maybe he left, maybe there was a divorce because of his incessant adultery and she was not to be sentenced to that ugly relationship the rest of her days. So she's now single. And she's broken hearted. She's had it with a man. She feels burned and hurt. And so in her young years and in the emotion of the moment and maybe still feeling the love and the lingering anxiety over this one man that she really did care for, she says, "I'll never get into another relationship. From here on I devote my life to the Lord. I want to serve the Lord. Please put me on the list. I want to go out with those other godly women and just serve the Lord." And that's probably a very true scenario.

The problem with that was in her youth she would find herself hard pressed to sustain the kind of commitment she felt in the midst of the emotional trauma of the loss of her husband. And so Paul writes in verse 11, "The younger women who are bereft and alone refuse..." very strong verb, very strong...refuse..."do not put them on the list," is what he means. It's the same verb used in chapter 4 verse 7 where it says "refuse false doctrine." Put it away, don't allow a young woman to go on that." Now that confirms what we saw in verse 9, doesn't it, that she needed to be 60 years of age. Don't let a young woman do that. Young women are eligible for support in the time of their distress if they're widows indeed, true widows. They're eligible to be cared for by the church but don't put them on the official serving group of the church. Don't allow that to happen.

Why? Follow it in verse 11. "For when they have begun to become or grow wanton against Christ, they will wish to marry." They will desire to marry, the verb stresses the desire. What's going to happen, he says, is this, they're going to make a vow to God and Numbers, by the way Numbers chapter 30, write that down somewhere for future study, Numbers chapter 30 about verse 9 to 16 talks about the fact that when a woman makes a vow to God and is widowed, she has to keep that vow. God put a high premium on integrity of speech and didn't want people making covenants to Him they weren't intending to keep. So in that very chapter, Jewish women would be well instructed that when you made a promise to God, you kept that promise. And that would be a matter of basic integrity but it certainly reinforced specifically as to a woman who loses her husband there in Numbers 30.

So here is this woman, she makes this rash vow to God, having lost her husband. After a little while the grieving process is over. And then all she can feel is the desire to be married again. She longs to

be married. And so verse 11 says, "When they have begun to grow wanton." Let me tell you what that really means translating it simply in the Greek, "When they have started to feel the impulse of sexual desire." And that doesn't just mean sexual desire for the sexual act itself, but desire for a man and all that is embodied in that. When she begins to feel desire that a normal woman would have to a man, you start to have a problem. By the way, the verb is used only here in the New Testament and elsewhere outside the Scripture it's used of an ox trying to escape from the yoke. She's going to want to break out of this rash vow and covenant that she made. The word "wanton" implies without regard for what is right. She starts to feel strong desire, she starts to chafe against the yoke she has imposed on herself by her vow to serve the Lord. She's been put on the list, let's assume, and now she's got an official title, official capacity, she's supposed to be the model of spiritual virtue. She's going around teaching other women how to do it, how to be godly, how to love your husband, how to raise your children...and all the while she's just bursting inside to get out of this yoke, overturn this covenant and find a man. In fact, I wouldn't want such a woman running around loose among families and in and out of homes, she might be laying her hands on some man who is already somebody's husband.

But this would be...this would be the worst scene conceived in the mind of the Apostle as he writes. She'll resent her commitment. She'll serve under hostility. She'll begin to be hostile toward the Lord. She'll begin to be vulnerable toward men that might approach out there. She'll begin to approach men that she ought not to approach. And she will be very unfulfilled and very unhappy and very miserable. She knows it's wrong to break a promise, wrong to break a vow. And so she chafes under this situation wanting so desperately to marry and being stuck with the vow she made, she has no heart for the work and heartless work is no work at all. She is very vulnerable and especially as she circulates out in the community, she becomes a potential torch for a forest fire.

Such unfaithfulness to a covenant has consequence. Go to verse 12. This says actually "carrying about with them condemnation or judgment." A woman in that position who is trying to fulfill a vow, she's chafing against and hostile to, who is deeply desirous of marriage, feeling strong sensual desire in that way is carrying around a load on her back, a load of the sentence of God on such a broken covenant, such an ungrateful attitude, such an undesirable spirit and ultimately is going to be chastened by the Lord, judged by the Lord. That's the implication. She's just sort of a disaster waiting to happen when God drops His hammer.

Why? Because they have cast off their first faith. Now what does that mean? Well, it's difficult to be dogmatic about that. There are two possibilities. If we translate the word as faith, it means that maybe they have abandoned their original commitment to Christ which was a commitment to obey Him, to love HIm, to serve Him, to keep His Word, to do His will. The implication there may be that they just say, you know, "I'm through trying to serve Christ, I'm out, I'm going to do what I want to do." It could be translated pledge, the word can also mean pledge. And it would mean the specific covenant to serve the Lord the rest of her life as a group of women in the church had designed to do. So she

could be throwing off the original pledge she made in the moment of her sorrow. She could be throwing off her original commitment at salvation to give her life in service to Christ and obey His will. Either way, she violates her commitment to the Lord. The desire for marriage is so strong, she just begins to do everything to get out of what she's into, throws away her original pledge and even to the point where she violates the original commitment to obey the Lord. What does that mean? I imagine that means she begins to pursue an unrighteous life style. Maybe in her desperation she shows up at the local singles bar in Ephesus, if they had one. I don't know if they did. Maybe it means she goes so far as to begin to date nonbelievers. She violates her pledge on the one hand, she violates perhaps the original devotion that she articulated in the beginning in her Christian faith.

And, you know, because the pool of men is smaller to a lady a little later in life, because there's a background of having lived with a man and now you're not and there's a greater desperation because you've known that fulfillment and now it's taken away...very often women in that situation make relationships with men they ought never to make relationships with. They're impatient. They pursue a wrong relationship. And maybe even wind up marrying an unbeliever. I would like to hide from memory all of the women who have done that that I know of. That's why in 1 Corinthians 7:39 Paul says that a woman who has lost her husband can marry again but only in the Lord...only in the Lord. For her to marry an unbeliever is to replace Christ in the center of her life with an unbeliever in the center of her life. Keep it clear, that's exactly what a woman does when she marries an unbeliever. She takes Christ to the point where she made the commitment to Him. Picks Him up, puts Him out, puts an unbeliever right where she had the original commitment to Christ. For that to happen would bring a terrible reproach upon the church, upon the name of Christ...especially if she was on a list of people supposedly out there as the models of virtue for everyone else to follow.

But because of the weakness of a woman, because of her strong desire for a man, because of impatience, because of her inability to find a Christian man her age who is available, she may be drawn into a compromised relationship with a married man, lose her virtue. She may be compromised by being involved with an unmarried man who is not a believer, lose her virtue. She may end up marrying someone who dishonors God. So the first reason Paul says not to put women on the list who are young is to protect them from dishonoring Christ in this way.

Second reason in verse 13. And besides, he says, or at the same time also, they learn to be idle. Or literally this is an idiom meaning they qualify as idlers. Here's a second problem. The first problem is a problem of desire for a man. The second problem is immaturity. You put a young woman on this list...get this scene...and she's going from house to house ministering to these families, instructing other women, helping with the children, helping counsel and pray with them, and disciple them and nurture them and she's visiting the poor and the needy and the sick. And she's collecting a mass of very interesting information about everybody's personal life. And in the idleness of that if she is immature, Paul says in her going around from house to house, which no doubt is what those women did a great portion of the time because of the nature of their ministry in the circuit of service from

home to home, what originally was a purposeful visit to help minister becomes an aimless wandering with little or no spiritual work accomplished...at best it is social, at worst it is a devastating and disastrous enterprise. They simply wander around from house to house.

And not only are they idle, just wandering around from house to house, too immature to be of much help and too consumed with the desire for a man to care, what starts out as just a social meandering ends up, it says, look at verse 13, as not only idle but tale bearers also and busybodies, speaking things they ought not to speak. Now what starts out as something of great devotion and commitment soon is overpowered by a desire for marriage, a hostility grows in the heart. Pretty soon as they go they just go in a social whirl. That's the best of it. The worst of it is that the information they collect becomes fuel for the tales they tell and the busybody enterprise they engage in as they go around saying things they ought not to say. They're not doing anything constructive. They're doing things destructive.

The word for tattler or gossip means to babble. They just talk, to utter nonsense, to talk idly, to make empty charges, to accuse malicious words. All of those things. So they just go around carrying tales from one place to the next. As we shall see tonight in the study of James, that is absolutely disastrous. And then busybodies. Literally that means one who moves around. But it has to be one who moves around with a big nose...sticking it everywhere. Who out of curiosity goes around looking into things that isn't even of any concern to them, it's not even their business.

By the way, it's interesting that that word "busybody" occurs in Acts 19:19 with reference to people who involve themselves in magic. And when I looked that up I thought, "Well what in the world is the connection there? Why would busybodies be connected to magic?" And if you think about it, it's pretty simple. People who look into magic are prying into things that are hidden from human knowledge. And busybodies are doing the same thing. Just nosing around in things they ought not to be nosing into. So you can see this degeneration process. This woman is put on the list. She starts out in what is a ministry. She grows hostile to the ministry because she wants a man. Pretty soon it's nothing but a social swirl, just moving around. And then it begins to degenerate into tale bearing, prying into things she ought not to pry into. And it culminates finally at the end of verse 13 in her spreading things around she shouldn't even say. This is all a sign of immaturity. She hasn't reached that godliness of maturity that would save her from such exercises to destroy God's people and God's work.

Perhaps...perhaps in the church at Ephesus some of these women had become idle purveyors of false teaching. And that's why Paul in chapter 2 says women are not to teach. Perhaps the seducing spirits, the doctrines of demons, the hypocritical lie speakers who were spreading all the false theology around that community may well have been women as well as men. And some of those women immature and out of control who having lost their husbands were now free to get involved in these kind of enterprises. Perhaps not only moral evil, but doctrinal error could be the result of

immature women who are longing for men and had time on their hands and little good to do with it.

So, Paul says it takes a serious minded, mature, godly woman to minister to homes and families to be a part of their deepest needs, their deepest problems, their deepest secrets and not abuse that opportunity. For these reasons young women then are not to be put on the list so that they don't become a reproach.

Paul has a better idea in verse 14 for young women. I will, and as I told you boulomai is the will of desire that comes from reason not emotion. It's a rational thing due to prior reasoning which he has already given in verses 11 to 13. For these reasons we might assume therefore "I command," it has the force of a command, "that the younger marry."

Now this is exactly what the Scripture says. A younger woman who has lost her husband is to marry. You say, "Well is everybody up to 60 in that younger group?" I don't know. It's a general term...younger. It is qualified some in the verse itself. It says the younger women are to marry and bear children. So we might say that the younger could...would certainly encompass women who are still at a childbearing age. These women are to marry. Jewish custom, believe me, gave honor to remarriage. And that is Paul's command. This is not a concession, this is a command. And whenever I hear someone say, "Well, divorce might be tolerably biblically, but remarriage is never tolerable," to me that flies in the face of the intention of the heart of God revealed in this passage, and that is to protect a single woman from having to live a life of singleness in which she is constantly coping with strong desires and constantly in her immaturity unable to handle all that's going on around her to provide for herself. I believe it is God's design for a young woman who has lost her husband to remarry. That's what the text says.

There may be exceptions. And I'm not certainly saying, neither is Paul, that every woman who has lost her husband becomes a woman on the warpath, that every woman who has lost her husband is a sensual woman looking for trouble, that every woman who has lost her husband is a tale bearer and a gossip, but that tends to be a problem. And so he says, and this is the general picture, young woman...he doesn't even use the word "woman" here, it just the younger, he's already told us the younger he refers to back in verse 11, younger who have lost their husband...he says, "They are to marry," because that's the sphere of a woman's calling, that's the sphere of her life. That's what she is designed to do. She needs a man, the care, the protection, the sustenance of a man. That's is God's design.

It's not only a protection from irresponsible relationships, it's not only a protection from irresponsible behavior and idleness, but it is because God designed her to be in the sphere of the home. To say that there's a provision in the Bible for divorce but none for remarriage is to have faced..to have faced a very difficult question about all the women God designed to be under the care and protection of a man that you are basically telling can't do that. Who is going to care for them? And people who

advocate that particular view, who say there's a justification in the Bible for divorce but none for remarriage need to come up with a fairly clearcut strategy for redefining womanhood and for telling how we're going to care for all these people who have no right to get another husband, because the burden falls squarely on the church. But the indication of Scripture is that women...again it doesn't say widows and if it did say widows, they would be again reminded that it means any woman who has lost her husband. And if she lost her husband through divorce, by adultery and she was innocent through desertion of an unbeliever, she'd be in the category where she would have a biblical right to remarry. She's instructed to do just that.

Now let me say this. There may be some women that God wants to remain in singleness. God at that point may allow a woman to be completely content to be single the rest of her life. But still, the general pattern is that a woman's desire will be naturally toward a man and her vulnerability and her protection and fulfillment will be covered, as it were, by that relationship. So Paul says there to marry.

Notice the details of her responsibility, verse 14. "I want them to marry and bear children." You know what that means? Very simple...have babies. It doesn't have anything to do with raising them, have babies. So if a woman is still at that age, she is to do that. It bothers me no end that our society keeps telling us that children are some kind of environmental pollution and anybody who has more than two ought to be dispossessed from our society for crowding the world. We ought to crowd the world with as many godly people as we possibly can, raising up godly seed is the purpose for which God has designed Christian homes. Bearing children is God's purpose for a woman and even though a woman had been married, lost her husband and needed to be remarried again, the purpose doesn't change. She is to have babies. And then it says she is to rule the house, oikodespoten, she is to do that and that includes managing the household, raising the children comes in at that point. Titus 2:4 and 5 says she's to be a keeper at home, oikiakos, it means to manage the home with the resources provided. The idea is the man provides, he goes out and gets the resources, brings them in, she dispenses them, manages them, cares for them on behalf of the family.

Boy, that is such a...that is such a simple and beautiful picture of the working together of a man and a woman in a home. That's, as I said a week ago, what I'm so excited about at the Master's College because in the Fall we'll begin a program to teach young women how to be managers of the home, keepers of the home with great skill and to really be the kind of person that can make the home what God wants it to be. What a tremendous, tremendous calling this is. So is this...so much is this a part of a woman that even when she's lost her husband, she is told to find another one and get back to doing that. It's almost as if it's a fish out of water told to jump back in to the nearest pond, only I don't want to say the nearest man. But it's the idea of the urgency of that sphere for a woman.

Now having said that I know I run the risk of somebody saying in their own marriage, "Oh boy, I hope it's just you and I forever." And we all ought to be married to each other with that in view. We don't want to be married with the idea that "I want you to know, honey, that as soon as you're gone I'm off

to another one," I mean, that's not going to...that's not going to cultivate the kind of relationship you really want. But...and that, I think, is covered in the onewoman man and the oneman woman. And there was a waiting period even in a Jewish remarriage. They were waiting to make sure there wasn't a pregnancy. But there was a waiting period and it covered a lot of ground until there was an allowable remarriage.

Why this? Why should a woman go back into the home and be under the care of a man and minister in that home, giving leadership to that home? Why? "In order to give no occasion to the adversary to blaspheme or to speak reproachfully." The term "occasion" is a launching point, a base of operations. The adversary, any enemy of the cross, any enemy of the gospel, any enemy of the Word of God. Of course the ultimate adversary is Satan, but his slander always comes through human agents. And so if women go into the home and fulfill their Godordained task and raise up a godly generation of young people and manage that home, they will take away the reproach that is cast against the church and against the people of God. And men and women who violate God's purpose give fuel for the fires. And there are always those people who want to tear the church's reputation to pieces. They're instruments of the devil looking for anything they can find. And so, in order to keep them from having any source of slander, the young women rather than being vulnerable and exposed to sin, exposed to bitterness against Christ, exposed to whatever the world may bring to bear upon them are to go back into the security, the nurture, the strength, the protection of a godly relationship with a man in the sphere where God intended them to be.

Sadly he says in verse 15, "Some...for some are already turned aside after Satan." Paul says I regret to say that in your church assembly some have already gone off. Some have already turned from their vow to Christ. Some have already left the true calling of a woman to the home. Some are out following false teachers. Some are following their own lusts. Some are swerving from the path of virtue. Some may be the silly women laden down with lusts that he mentions in 2 Timothy chapter 3. Some have already spread lies. Some have already been busy with other people's affairs. Some have given their ears to seducing spirits, believing doctrine of demons. Some have engaged in perhaps power play to become teachers in the church. Some have acted in immoral ways. Some have broken promises to the Lord. Some have married unbelievers.

Paul says, "Look, get married to a believer, get back in the home, fulfill your Godgiven design so that there's no reproach brought on the church." So we see very clearly what God wants women to be in this passage, don't we? There shouldn't even be any question about it. It's so patently obvious what God desires of a woman.

Then a final point in verse 16 which we've already alluded to. At the very end, almost as if he wants to wrap his argument up and bring it back full circle to where he started, he says this, the church has an obligation to make sure capable women also support their widows so they are not left to the care of the church. Verse 16 reads, "If any woman, any believing woman...the text says...if any believing

woman that has widows, let her assist them."

That's what I told you. The third line of responsibility. First, children and grandchildren. Secondly, a man in the family to provide. Thirdly, a woman to provide. There were women, of course, who had the resources. Some of them might have been widowed women. Some of them might have been women married to an unbeliever who were given the management of their household and could take some of what they had and give it to other women who had need. It didn't always have to be money, it could be meals, could be lodging, could be many things...clothing. So not only were believing men to provide for their extended household, those women who had need, but even women were to do that as well. Let them assist.

And you know, don't you well, that many widowed women care for their widowed mothers? That's not uncommon to us. Very common. The reason is, the end of verse 16, "Let not the church be charged that it may relieve them that are widows indeed." In other words, don't even get down to the responsibility for the church to care for a person until all these other possibilities have been exhausted.

Children, grandchildren, men in the family, women in the family, if there is no support in all those areas, then the responsibility comes to the church and we're full circle back to verse 3 where the church is said in general to be responsible to support bereft women who are really bereft. That is they have no other means of support.

Now what do we mean by the church? Let me answer that in this way. You are the church and I am the church. If you or if I have the resources to support them, then we should do it. If we don't, then we come to the church and as a body collectively we do it. But it should be our joy as individuals, if God's given us the resource, to take the joy on ourselves to do that. And we should do that eagerly.

You say, "Well why should we be so eager to spend our money like that?" Listen to it this way. Deuteronomy chapter 14 lays down, I think, a principle that we want to know. It says that "The fatherless and the widow who are within your gates shall come and shall eat and be satisfied." This was God's law for His people Israel. "In order that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do."

Why should I as a person be eager to support a widow? Because I have the promise of the blessing of God. Why should I pass that off to the church when I can enjoy it myself? And there are some teeth in that, too, because in chapter 27 of Deuteronomy the law of God said this, "Cursed be he who perverts the justice due the sojourner, the fatherless and the widow."

Help a widow, be blessed. Fail to help a widow, be cursed. God is looking at you and God says if a widow comes across your path, and you have the resources to help and you help, I bless you. And

you don't help and you forfeit blessing, and you come under the curse...now we don't want to extrapolate too much out of the covenant given to Israel, but certainly if God was pleased with the care of a widow then, He is pleased with the care of a widow now. If He was displeased with the lack of care then, He is displeased with the lack of care now. So the responsibility falls upon the individual initially and God knows that and then passes where there is no capability to the church as such.

Well the sum of all of this, what shall we say? The burden that God has placed upon men is clear and a joyous and happy burden it is. The responsibility God has placed on women is clear and a joyous responsibility it is as well. Can we sum it up? A woman is to have a reputation for good works. She is to give birth to and raise up godly children. She is to open her home with hospitality to strangers who are in need of care. She is to show gracious humble lowly service to those who cross her path, even to the point of washing their feet. She is to assist all who are in trouble with her kindness and selfsacrifice. She is to devote herself to every good work possible, avoiding being idle, floating around from house to house, gossiping, focusing on keeping her own home, assisting those other women in need whom she can help. And all of this results in a noreproach life which silences the enemy and also makes her a woman worthy to be cared for and officially identified within the church as one who ministers in the name of Christ. Such is the design of God and such is the blessing on those who are obedient to that intended design. Let's pray together.

Father, there's so much that applies so directly to life in this passage. And it's been my prayer, as You know, that not one word spoken would in any way reflect other than the divine intention, that we would communicate with the same truth and the same spirit that which You desire to communicate. Thank You, O God, for the wonder of womanhood, for the beauty of Your design, for that wonderful privilege that has been given to men to care for the woman of God's choice. Thank You for the design of woman who cares for the man of God's choice. Thank You for the home.

We thank You, Lord, for the reminder today of what You have called us to, men and women. And we would pray for every husband and every wife, O God, that through the means of grace we all may be what You would have us to be. Forgive us for our many failures. We would pray for those single women who have deep heart longings for that husband that's not yet there, whether they have never married or whether they have lost their husband. We pray for their spiritual strength, for the depth of their walk in the Spirit, for their patience. And we would ask that You in grace would provide for them, that they might be fulfilled in every way. We would pray as well for the raising of godly children, for the keeping of homes that are sanctuaries of faith and hope and love. And we would pray that in all of our relationships together we might never give cause for the enemy to bear any arms against us successfully because we walk in obedience to Your Word and Your will. Answer by Your Spirit all the unanswered questions and help us to know the blessing that comes to those who obey for the Savior's sake. Amen.

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