

Honor Widows (Part 1)

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[0 : 00] Beginning of verse 3, Paul says, Honor widows who are truly widows.

! But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than 60 years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work, but refuse to enroll widows for when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry, and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith. Besides that, they learn to be idlers going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies saying what they should not.

So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander, for some have already strayed after Satan. If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows. May God add a blessing to the reading of his word. Would you please be seated? Still no? Okay. The Gospels document Jesus' words as he approached death on the cross.

[2 : 16] And while every statement he made is significant, it's interesting to me that he only spoke directly to three individuals from the cross. One of them was one of the criminals who was crucified alongside of him. Initially, this criminal joined the other criminal in mocking Jesus along with the crowd that had gathered that day to witness his crucifixion. However, as the hours passed along, that criminal was convicted by Jesus' words, by his actions on the cross, and he turned to him in faith and he asked him to remember him when he came into his kingdom. And so Jesus said to him, today you will be with me in paradise. In John chapter 19, verses 26 through 27, that passage records the two other individuals that Jesus directly spoke to from the cross. I want to read that with you this morning. From the cross, John 19, 26 says, when Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, woman, behold your son. Then he said to the disciple, behold your mother. And from that hour, the disciple took her to his own home. While Jesus bore the burden of our sins on the cross, he demonstrated care for the salvation of one sinner and concern for the well-being of one widow.

And speaking to these individuals, Jesus, the Son of God, once again communicates to us the heart of God. You know, I think as Christians, we are more aware of the heart of God to save sinners than the special interest that he has for widows.

As a church, I think we are more aware of our Lord's command to go and make disciples and to disciple disciples than his command for us to also care for widows. Now, please don't misunderstand me.

The purpose of the church is to make disciples. That's our primary purpose. I'm not suggesting that our purpose is primarily as a church to care for widows over making disciples, nor am I suggesting that those two things are equally important. What I am suggesting, or I guess what I'm questioning, is whether you and I as Christians or if we in the church share God's concern about caring for widows.

A quick survey of the Old Testament reveals God is very concerned for widows, and we see that through the instructions that he gave for his people to care for them and his warnings about what would happen to them if they didn't. For example, in Deuteronomy 24 19, God said to his people, when you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it.

[6 : 03] It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you and all the work of your hands. In Exodus 22, 22 through 24, God says to his people, you shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. And here's the warning. If you mistreat, treat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows, and your children fatherless.

God also made provisions for younger widows through something in the Old Testament called Leverite marriage. The purpose of that law ensured that a man who died before producing a son might still have an heir. And so the unmarried brother of the widow's husband would take her as his wife, and if they had a son, then that son would be the heir of her deceased husband. If the deceased husband did not have an unmarried brother, the responsibility fell to the nearest kin in the family. And an example of that principle in action was the marriage of Boaz to Ruth. Their son, by the way, was Obed, the grandfather of King David, whom Jesus' early earthly parents descended from. So Ruth, a young widow, was part of God's redemptive plan. As in the Old Testament, we continue to see God demonstrate his care and provision for widows in the New Testament. For example, in Mark 12 40,

Jesus condemned the Pharisees, who he said were guilty of devouring widows' houses. Like religious charlatans today, those men saw widows as women to be exploited, not supported. Another example, in Luke chapter 7, verses 11 through 15, we see once again how God demonstrates his concern and care for widows.

There we read, Soon afterward, he, Jesus, went to a town called Nain, and his disciples in a great crowd went with him. As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a considerable crowd from the town was with her.

This is what I want you to see here too. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her. And he said to her, do not weep. Then he came up and he touched the bier and the bier stood still. And he said, young man, I say to you, arise. And the dead man sought up and began to speak.

[9 : 13] And Jesus gave him to his mother. This widow's situation in this culture, in this time, was desperate. Without a husband, without a son, she had no means of support. And she was obviously heartbroken over all of this. And Jesus sees her, and he chooses to show compassion to her by bringing her dead son back to life. It's also interesting to note that later in Acts, in Acts chapter 6, the first ministry to develop in the early church involved caring for the widows of the church through the implementation of deacons. All of this to establish a truth revealed by God throughout his word that God is concerned and he cares for widows and he commands his church to share that same concern and to provide for them. In 1 Timothy chapter 5 verses 3 through 16, the apostle Paul is giving instructions to the church in Ephesus to care for widows in their congregation in the same way that God does. And that serves as the main idea for this morning's sermon. The church must care for widows in the same way that God does. The church must care for widows in the same way that God does.

Again, Paul, the apostle Paul, is writing to Timothy, a young pastor who's pastoring the church in Ephesus. And he states his purpose for writing this letter very clearly in chapter 3 verses 14 through 15.

He says, The church in Ephesus was in disorder due primarily to false teachers who were spreading false teachings.

And so Timothy's task was to put the church back into order. He was to do that by identifying men to serve alongside of him as elders and deacons. He was to expel false teachers and their influence from the church. And now in chapter 5, Paul gives further instructions for Timothy to pass on to the church.

In verses 1 through 2, if you remember from a few weeks ago, Paul encouraged Timothy to confront church members when they sin. But the way that he was to do that was important. He needed to approach each member of the church as a part of the household of God, as a part of his family.

[12 : 12] The Bible says that people who go to church with us, the people who sit in the pews next to us every Sunday, if they are genuinely saved, they are our spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ.

They're our family. They are the people that Jesus died to save. And so we must be concerned for them.

This is a very serious thing. Look with me at 1 John 3, 14 through 18. There John says that we know that we have passed out of death into life.

This means we know that we are saved because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

By this we know love that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

[13 : 25] Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth. In other words, the way that we treat each other as fellow believers, adopted by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, is indicative of our relationship to Jesus.

It reveals whether we have truly passed out of death into life. If we've truly been transformed by the indwelling of the Spirit, regenerating us when we were born again by faith in Jesus Christ, or if we haven't been.

So on the one hand, we see in the beginning of chapter 5, that the church is to love each other as a family, and part of the way that they do that is by confronting each other with a loving attitude when we sin, seeking restoration, seeking correction, seeking to help each other pursue Christlikeness. And now as Paul moves forward with his instructions for the church, he demonstrates how the church, functioning as the family of God, must show care and concern for those who have no family, those who are widows.

James 1.27 says, And so that's Paul's motivation here for the church in Ephesus, that they would care for widows the way that God cares for widows.

[15 : 10] Paul's instruction in our text today were both intended to instruct and to correct. Paul is instructing Timothy in how to lead the church to care for widows in the same way God does, probably because they didn't care, or they didn't care as much as they should.

And so I ask you, brother, sister, friend, do you care? Do you have the same care and concern for widows?

Maybe you care. Maybe you saw the title of this sermon in your bulletin this week or this morning, and you thought, ah, man, a sermon about widows? Do you care?

You should. You should care, because as a Christian, God commands you to care. And that should be enough for all of us to care.

But do you? Like the church in Ephesus, we have widows in our church. Do you know who they are?

[16 : 27] Do they know that we care? Do they feel supported? Do we know if they need our support? There's other reasons why you should care about this, Christian.

If you're a husband, you should care about this, because the day may come when the Lord takes you home before he takes your wife home to be with him.

And in such a case, you should be concerned that she has the support that she needs so she doesn't become a burden to the church. As a young person, you should care.

You need to understand the responsibility that you have according to God's word to care for your parents in their old age, especially if one of them leaves and goes home to be with the Lord before the other.

You need to care. You need to know what you're going to do. And you need to know what you're going to do based upon what God has told you to do in his word. As a church, we are to reflect the character of Christ.

[17 : 34] Not our culture. You probably agree with me that our culture often sees older people not as people to honor but as people who are just kind of in the way.

And that's wrong. And often in our culture, we see older people are the targets of scammers. And often in our culture, we see that their children who should be taking care of them are still mooching off of them and depleting them of the limited resources that they have.

It can't be that way in the church. Now, I don't intend to leave out our widowers. We need to love you and care for you too.

And I think that the principles that I'll go over today in many ways apply to you too, but the Bible makes a distinction and directly addresses widows in our text this morning.

And so while this text and sermon will address care and concern for widows, please know that we care about you too. And in fact, we should care about everyone who is a part of our church family.

[18 : 52] And maybe you're here this morning and you are not a believer. and you may have heard everything that I've said to this point. You might think, what does this have to do with me? Well, friends, you are stepping into a family worship service.

And I hope that you'll see something in our text and in our church that is missing in your life. That you would be wondering, why do all these people who are very different from one another and who aren't related to one another by blood?

Why do they care for each other so much? Like they're a family. And friend, it's because we are a family. No family is perfect.

We're not perfect, but we are a family because we've been adopted by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. He's saved us.

He's changed us. He's changing us. And I hope today He will save you too. So you'll hear the good news of the gospel, who He is and what He's done, and that He'll adopt you into His family.

[20 : 06] And so, in our text today, there are three ways that the church must care for widows in the same way as God. And I'm only going to get to one of those ways this morning.

The first way is that we are to extend support for those who are truly widows. The church, we, are to extend support for those who are truly widows.

Again, in the beginning of verse 3, Paul says, honor widows who are truly widows. Now, we need to understand what life was like for a widow living in the first century in Ephesus because there are some significant differences between those widows and widows living in 21st century America.

The word translated as widow is the Greek word *kera*. It's an adjective used as a noun and could be used to describe someone who was grieving, someone who was robbed, someone who was suffering loss, or someone who had been left all alone.

It was primarily used to describe a woman who lost her husband through death, but it could also be used to describe a woman whose husband deserted her or divorced her.

[21 : 26] In this time, there weren't many, if any, jobs for a woman. Most jobs in this time, in this place, required physical labor and they just didn't hire women for these jobs.

It was frowned upon. And women didn't have a place in society that they do in ours. Oftentimes, they were seen as property, as lower people than the men.

During this time as well, they also didn't have the forms of government assistance that are available in our culture, in our time, for those who are in need. So when a husband died, everything that he had transferred over not to his wife, but to his eldest son.

So a first century widow was totally dependent upon her children and surviving family members for her basic living needs. And if they chose not to care for her, she was left totally uncared for, and she would have to beg from others just to get what she needed to survive.

Now, in our culture, in our time and place, a husband's assets, for the most part, unless he specifies otherwise, go to his wife when he dies. Many couples in our culture, in our time, they have a retirement plan.

[23 : 01] They're saving up for that time when they are not going to work anymore. And so they don't become a burden to their children, and that's not a bad thing.

In our time and in our place, couples also often have insurance policies to provide for the other in case one of them dies. There are government assistance programs in our time, in our place.

There's medical insurance programs. There's assisted living places for elderly people. And while these safety nets aren't bad things, they can, and I think maybe they have, caused people in the church to think that we can just totally relinquish our responsibility for widows to others.

So we need to understand that while the context is different, the principle is the same. God still commands and expects that his church extends support to widows who are truly widows.

In verses 4 through 8, Paul defines what he means by those who are truly widows. The kind of widow who the church is to must extend support to.

[24 : 21] In verse 4, he says, but if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing to God.

And so see there that believers are commanded to make some return to their parents. The Greek word translated as show godliness is *Eusebion*, the only other place where that word appears in the New Testament is in Acts chapter 17 verse 23.

There, the apostle Paul used it to describe the Athenians' worship of an unknown god. The Athenians sensed indebtedness to their gods whom they worshipped.

They were concerned that there might be a god since they had so many gods that there might be a god who they didn't know and whom they didn't want to offend. and so they set up an altar to worship it showing it that they were devoted to it.

The idea here is that believers show their devotion to the one true God by devoting themselves to care for those whom he cares about.

[25 : 40] Especially their Christian mothers who are doubly their family members by blood and by faith. As Christians we shouldn't look to the church to primarily support our widowed parents.

We should willingly take on that responsibility ourselves whether they are our parents or the parents of our spouse. Caring for a widowed mother making some kind of return to support her whether that's paying her bills helping her pay her bills taking her to appointments calling just to talk or giving her a place to live in your house.

Friend that is a small thing compared to the years she has spent feeding you clothing you housing you supporting you putting up with you nurturing you encouraging you and loving you.

Christian if you have a widowed parent God expects that you extend support to them. You are to be the primary caregiver not the church or anyone else.

You are to make a return for all the years that they've invested in you. You know in the years that I've pastored here I've seen a number of you do this.

[27 : 10] you've brought your widowed mother or father to live in your house. You've brought them to church and I've seen how our church has made them feel welcomed and cared for and that is a good thing.

And I want to thank you for your example. You have set an example for people like me whose parents are both still alive. it encourages us that if that becomes our case one day that we'll do the same.

You've honored the Lord by helping those who couldn't help themselves and isn't that a picture of the gospel? If your parents are alive today in front I encourage you to talk to your spouse talk to your siblings if you have any and have some kind of a plan to extend support to your parents when or if the time comes that they will be widowed and can't support themselves any longer.

I know for our kids I joke with them and I say now one of you is going to have to take care of us when me and mom get older. You're going to have to feed us. You're going to have to bathe us. You're going to have to clothe us. You're going to have to do other things for us. And though it's a joke, it's true. And so far they have said that they will.

[28 : 35] We'll see what happens. But look at what the Bible says about a Christian who abandons this responsibility in verse 8. Look down at verse 8. But if anyone does not provide for his relatives and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

I don't think it was long after I started serving as pastor here that there was some event back up in Kansas City that Danny and I went to. And while we were up there, we found out that one of our elderly church members, who was a widow, was not doing well and she was in a nursing home and her health was failing.

And so we decided that we would go see her. Her son was not a believer, but her grandkids were. and we found out where this nursing home was.

Neither of us had ever heard of it. It was way out in the middle of nowhere. And so we went to visit her and I was appalled by the condition she was living in.

She was sharing a room with about three or four other people, this small little room and her bed was nothing more than really just a cot. And it was clear that no one was really giving her any kind of attention.

[30 : 12] It was heartbreaking because I knew how much this woman had done for her family. I knew how much she had cared for them, how much she had provided for them. And I just couldn't believe that they would leave her to live in this squalor.

And she told us that nobody had come to see her. And it was heartbreaking. I remember when we got back into the car, Danny said, you have to say something.

And what Paul is talking about here isn't a denial of the faith by the believer who doesn't extend support for the relatives as if they've lost their salvation.

but it is a denial of the principles of our faith. To extend support motivated by our love and compassion for others, especially people who are members of our family by blood, by law, and by faith.

Commenting on this verse, Robert Yarbrough said, anyone who has relatives who are widows to some extent has responsibility to care for them. This duty is all the more clear to close relatives of one's own household, such as one's mother or mother-in-law or grandmother.

[31 : 34] Intertwined in the discourse of this verse is the further complication of dual family identity. There are family members by birth and marriage, and there is the sometimes much closer tie of family members through rebirth by faith in Christ.

Jesus made this point powerfully. Family of faith ties are even more binding than sometimes misguided and splintered natural family demands. And then he quotes Matthew 12, 46 through 50. While Jesus was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside asking to speak with him. But he replied to the man who told him, who is my mother and who are my brothers?

And stretching out his hands, towards his disciples, he said, here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.

Paul's point in verse 8 is that believers who care less for destitute members of their families like widows show less compassion than their unbelieving neighbors, which is a denial of the transformative power of Jesus Christ to save sinners.

[32 : 53] It's a denial of the new nature received in the new birth, and it just, it can't happen. We as a church, we as the people of God, we as followers of Jesus Christ, we can't care less for those who are uncared for than unbelievers.

sinners. As Christians, we should not put the burden primarily on the church, but on ourselves. After all, did Jesus not bear our sins himself on the cross?

And so we should be willing to bear the burdens of those whom we are called and commanded and enabled to love to. but there are some widows who are truly widows in the church, meaning there are some widows who don't have family members to support them or whose family members refuse to extend support for them.

In such unfortunate cases, Paul says that the church must extend to support to them, but there are requirements that must be met for that, and he lists those requirements in verses 5-7.

She who is truly a widow left all alone has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. But she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.

[34 : 14] Command these things as well so that they may be without reproach. And so the church is to extend support to widows who are left all alone.

Again, meaning that she has no family to support her or her family refuses to support her, but she must be a Christian. She must be one who has set her hope on God.

This means that she has trusted in Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior. She trusts that God will provide for her material, physical needs because he's provided for her spiritual needs.

She trusts that God's church will obey his command to extend the support to her that she needs. She is a woman who is not idle and hasn't given up hope.

She continues to pursue the Lord. She prays. She worships. She regularly gathers with her church family. She involves herself in the church.

[35 : 13] She's a disciplined disciple of Jesus Christ. She also allows the church to extend support because she isn't too prideful.

Now let me stop there for just one second. If you are a widow or a widower and you need help, you need to let us know that you need help. Otherwise, you are not letting us be obedient to what God has commanded.

Paul continues on. He's talking about if she does meet all these things, then she is worthy of receiving the church's support. But if she doesn't, if she misuses those resources for selfish, self-indulgent pleasures, then he says that she's spiritually dead, she is unsaved, and such women, such people are not to receive any kind of material support from the church.

Instead, what they most need is the gospel. They need to be warned of the eternal consequences of their sins. They need to be pointed to Jesus Christ as the one, the only one who can save.

That's the correction. That's the confrontation that these women need. that all unbelievers need. If she isn't saved, she needs to hear the gospel.

[36 : 36] If she is saved, she needs to have her sins confronted in ways that communicate our love for the Lord and for her, and we need to support such people.

The next time we go through these verses, we'll turn our attention to the two other ways that we are to care for widows in the church in the same way that God does.

Because God not only expects the church to extend support to widows in our congregation, he also, widows, has a special ministry that he expects you to serve in in the church.

church. But for now, please let me remind you that the Lord hasn't forgotten you. And I pray that as our church, as your church family, you will know and you will see from us that we haven't forgotten you either.

And so how should we adjust our lives to what we've heard in God's word this morning? To plead the widow's case. Isaiah 1, 16 through 17 says, wash yourselves, make yourselves clean, remove the evil of your deeds from before.

[37 : 55] My eyes cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice, correct oppression, bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's case.

And if we've truly been saved, Jesus says that there should be fruit of our salvation. There should be a change. in our attitude, there should be a change in our ways.

And one of those changes is that we seek to do good, not so that we will be saved, but because we are saved. And we pay attention to those that others have forgotten and we seek to care for those who are uncared for, not that we would receive anything in return, but because it's the good thing, the right thing to do.

It's what pleases God. It's fruit. fruit that demonstrates that we truly have been saved by Jesus Christ.

And if you're here this morning and you're not a believer, friend, let me tell you that God has brought you into this place at this time for the purpose that you will hear the gospel.

[39 : 06] Today, he invites you to become a part of his family. And it's not about the works that you do. Helping widows. You can go out and have the greatest widow ministry of all time, helping people who are uncared for, but if you don't know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you're not saved.

You can't do enough good works to put God in your debt. He is completely and totally holy. And we are all sinful, and the Bible says that we fall way short of the glory of God.

That's why Jesus had to come. We had to have no hope if Jesus hadn't come and lived the sinless life that you and I could never live, to die on the cross, to atone for our sins, and who rose again on the third day, proving that the work he did is done.

It's sufficient. There's no work for us to do. Salvation is a result of God's grace through our faith in Jesus Christ, turning from our sins and turning to him, acknowledging that the work is done.

And when we do that, we're clothed in his righteousness, we are saved, we have eternal life, and we do good, not so that we will be saved or that we will stay saved.

[40 : 42] God has done that, and he's the one who does that. We do it because we're joyful in what Jesus has done for us, and we're eager to be more like him, and we're eager to bear fruit.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the care that you have for those who are completely helpless and destitute.

God, the reality is that each one of us was completely helpless and destitute. That, Lord, if you hadn't been gracious, I'd to send your son to save us, we would have no hope.

We'd be left all alone. We would suffer eternally apart from you forever. But, God, because you love, you care for us, you sent your son to help the helpless, us to die in our place for the sins that we've committed, to bear our burdens.

That by faith in you, we are adopted into your family. You call us your sons and your daughters, and you keep us forever.

[42 : 15] Lord, I pray that as your church, that we would be convicted of what we've read in your word this morning, that maybe we don't care as much as we ought to care for widows in our congregation.

And so, Lord, I pray that through your word this morning that you would help us to just be thinking about what we are doing, what we aren't doing, and what we need to do so that, Lord, we are helping those that we are doing what you've commanded us to do in your word, that, Lord, we would more reflect Christ and less be a reflection of our culture.

And so, God, we pray for your help in this, and Lord, we pray that you would be pleased with the works that we do, not because they save us, but because we have been saved, and that you would be glorified.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.