

God's Compassion for Widows

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[0:00] Well, we'll get started, fellas.

Might even get you out here at a decent hour. I don't want to shock your system, but I was never a fan of Phil Donahue. I never watched his show. I never read any of his books or paid any attention to his wife, Marlo Thomas.

I kind of like Danny Thomas. I grew up with him when I was little. And, of course, he was the money behind St. Jude's, and they do a great work.

But years ago, and we're going back a long time ago, I was surfing through the channels, and I passed Donahue, and just as I passed it, he said the word Christianity.

So I backed up because I wanted to see what he was talking about. He was slamming our faith because of what he called Christianity's archaic and repressive treatment of women.

[1:15] And, of course, women's rights, such as abortion on demand, were his mantra. If it hadn't been, he wouldn't have stayed married very long to Marlo Thomas.

Donahue, in this little snippet that I hung around for a couple minutes, claimed there was nothing in Christianity that could overcome the repressive treatment of women.

I was home alone at the time, so I'm screaming at the television screen as if that's going to somehow send a message, I guess. And I said, look to the cross.

Look to the cross. And one of the very first things that Jesus did from the cross was tenderly provide for his mother, who, by the way, was a widow.

So he appointed the apostle John as her guardian, or in the words of our Lord from the cross, her new son.

[2:18] Very moving. Christianity has always made great provision for women. They are and should be objects of great care on the part of men in the church.

And today we come to a section of scripture that deals with the care and support of women that have special needs within the church.

Christ calls husbands to love and care for their wives. But when that husband is gone, that care does not end as far as the church is concerned.

God has a very special concern for women in the church who have lost their husbands. And over the years we've had a lot of them.

This concern was recorded many places in the Old Testament. Men were required to look after widows and their children and even plead their cause before God and before men.

[3:36] One of the most tender, moving stories, in my opinion, and I've taught it in here and the pastors taught it, was the great example of Ruth and Boaz, kinsman redeemer, type of Christ.

Marvelous story. I highly recommend you get that out and read it this week. Not very long. The New Testament bears testimony to the tender heart and compassion of God toward widows.

Here are the words of our Lord in Mark chapter 12, beginning in verse 41. And he sat down opposite the treasury and begins observing how the people were putting money into the treasury. And many rich people were putting in large sums. Poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent.

Calling his disciples to him. We're talking about the Lord, of course. He said to them, Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury, for they put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on.

[4:56] Of course, the collection was a big thing in Israel. And I'm told the Pharisees and others during the collection would take their coins and raise them up, you know, as high as they could and drop them in to get the maximum effect among the congregation.

They'd hear this sound of this poor widow put in two mites, I believe some translations say. We learn a number of things about widows in this passage.

For the most part, they were poor and they did not have the means to earn a living. And they did live in a repressive society for females. Often they were barred from employment outside of the home.

So when they became widows, it fell on the local synagogue to make provision for them and to put them under their care.

Dr. Luke records a gripping display of our Lord's compassion for widows in Luke chapter 7. And soon afterwards, he went to a city called Nain and his disciples were going along with him, accompanied by a large crowd.

[6:10] Now as he, that's Jesus, approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out. The only son of his mother. And she was a widow.

And a sizable crowd for the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, he felt compassion for her and said to her, do not weep. And he came up and touched the coffin and the bears came to a halt. And he said, young man, I say to you, arise. That would probably get your attention. And the man sat up and began to speak. That would really get your attention.

And Jesus gave him back to his mother. Fear gripped them all and they began glorifying God saying, a great prophet has arisen among us.

And God has visited his people. This report concerning him went out all over Judea and all the surrounding districts. Too bad they forgot that in Passion Week.

[7:11] You know, God has visited his people. Here we have a widow. And the only male in her life who happens to be her son.

And he dies leaving her with no means of support. Moved with loving compassion, our Lord raises the son from the dead and restores him to his mother.

Mr. Donahue didn't bring that story up when he was slamming Christianity. With all of this as a backdrop, it is no surprise that early on, the church developed the means to care for widows.

James said that true religion was caring for widows and orphans in their distress. First chapter, verse 27. So Paul, who is developing Timothy to lead the church, to select elders, Paul is going to address the topic of widows and their care with Timothy and through him the church literally down through the ages.

This hasn't been abrogated in our day. But this we know. The church is to support widows. It's not a blanket support.

[8:38] It's not a blank check. But we are to support widows. Honor widows who are widows indeed. Isn't that interesting language? It really gripped me.

Chapter 5, verse 3 of 1 Timothy. Honor widows who are widows indeed. And if any time in this you get a lesson here and it says windows, that's widows.

Spellshack won't cancel out windows. When we use the word widow, we in the English speaking world think in terms of a woman whose husband is dead.

In the Greek language, the expression is broader. It can be a woman whose husband is dead. It can be a woman whose husband has left her alone, basically abandoned her.

She's been deserted. Perhaps her husband, for some reason, has been imprisoned. Such a broad term puts the church in a very interesting position.

[9:45] Are we prepared to support women, for instance, whose husbands are incarcerated for a crime? I remember many years ago I was in California and on a Wednesday night, had nothing to do, and I visited Saddleback Church.

On the way home I remember thinking, why didn't I go to Grace Community Church and listen to John MacArthur? But anyway, I went to Saddleback. Rick Warren was actually in Oklahoma City that night preaching, and they had a guest preacher. They had like 40 ministries, and one of them was women whose husbands were in prison, a ministry for that very purpose.

So we're in an interesting position. Do we support a woman whose husband has been incarcerated for a lengthy period of time? We, of course, live in a time where women are deserted.

We live in a time of easy divorce. You want a divorce? Go down to the courthouse. Irreconcilable differences. No one ever defines that. You know, no one is turned down for a divorce in our culture, in the secular courts.

A judge wouldn't have the guts to do that. So we live in a time of easy divorce. This can have major impact on the church.

[11 : 20] The treatment of widows is one of many tests for the church. How devoted to Christ are we when it comes to widows?

It's a question that we need to ask ourselves. It used the word honor there. Honor is a word that's very expressive in the original language. It can mean to show respect, show care.

It could mean support in terms of meeting financial needs. We do need to remember that the church is not obligated to support each and every widow.

And quite honestly, when I was studying for this, I found that as a revelation to me. We're not scripturally obligated. There are some exceptions to this.

The specific words that Paul used are, we are commanded to support those who are widows indeed.

[12 : 24] Very interesting language. For one thing, not all widows are alone. They're not all alone. Not all widows are without financial support.

Some have an inheritance from their late husband. Others have a family support system. They have children, sons who are able-bodied and working.

We are commanded as the church to support those who cannot meet the basic day-to-day living standards of the culture. I remember one example here.

It seemed like we've had fewer widows now, Mike, than we had 20, 30 years ago. I don't know why I say that. We've had a lot go on to be with the Lord over the years. But I remember one in particular.

We found out her thermostat in winter was on like 52 because she could not afford. And we got together, of course, and said, you need to raise that thermostat into some warmth for your house.

[13 : 35] The question, though, is how does a church determine whether or not a widow meets the qualifications for support?

And the answer is we have to evaluate the situation. We have to look at the situation with that particular widow.

1 Timothy 5, verse 4. But if any widow has children or grandchildren, they must first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family and to make some return to their parents, for this is acceptable in the sight of God.

Now she who is a widow indeed and who has been left alone has fixed her hope on God and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day.

But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives. Prescribe these things as well so that they may be above reproach. Pretty tough words from a very tough apostle.

[15 : 02] It would be impossible for a church to support the needs or the wants of every widow. It would be almost impossible.

Because of this, Paul establishes a certain criteria in order to create a list of eligible widows.

Widows that the church should support. Paul says, first of all, that if a widow has children or grandchildren, they are to be the chief resource of support.

The chief resource of support. I can get inflamed when I think a number of years ago, and I can't remember their names now, but we had a family here. She was really faithful.

Very limited income. Extremely limited. A widow. And she died and had a \$10,000 policy that would cover the funeral and the headstone.

[16 : 07] And, you know, her kids took that and left. The funeral home never got paid. And to this day, I don't think she has a headstone. I keep thinking I'm going to have to, I'm going to correct that someday.

But I always remember that. That came to my mind. I don't know why. The family always has the primary task of providing for their own widows.

And it's interesting in this culture, and I didn't even look this up. I'm going back from past lessons.

But you remember the doctrine of declaring, I think it was Corban, where you could go to the temple or to the priest and say, if you're a Jew, and say, all my money I dedicate to the Lord.

Now, all of a sudden, aged parents are starving. Well, I'm sorry, I can't keep anything. I dedicate all my money to the Lord. Of course, he's keeping it for himself. And, boy, the Lord really condemned that practice.

It is the family who has the primary task of providing for their own widows. The family is to practice piety. A very interesting word, and I looked it up, and it's used interchangeably with godliness.

[17:24] Godly behavior says you're going to take care of your mom in her old age. I did that. Mike, you know that. You're doing that with your parents now. And the only situation that I had was my mom didn't know it because she didn't know me.

You know, she had Alzheimer's. And my dad left provision for her. He was very, very wise about that. Genuine godliness begins in the family.

To support widows in one's family is to obey the Lord. And such an activity is acceptable in the sight of God. That we are to take care of literally our parents in their old age.

If a widow has been left alone or abandoned, she must be supported. She should be, and she must be supported. With no family, the church becomes her family.

Quite literally. And I know I got some deacons in here, and you guys are really probably the front men on this deal. You know the needs, or should know the needs out there.

[18:40] The church is their family. But there is another very important standard to be met. The widow that is being evaluated is supposed to be a follower of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus Christ. And we're talking about the church here. She needs to have her settled hope in the Lord. She's a member of the church.

The church invisible and the local body. As a believer, she trusts that God will meet her needs. And God will, working through his church.

And beyond being a believer, she needs to be an active believer. One participating. She is heavily involved in church matters.

Every now and then I would have older people come to me and say, I'm so old, I can't be engaged anymore like I used to be. Have you ever heard of prayer? You know? You're shut in?

[19:45] Pray. You can touch the world for the kingdom of God. If you need a list, I'll go out to VOM and get you a list of who to pray for. Pray. Praying night and day before God.

By such a mark, she will have a reputation of being fully committed to the Lord. We're not talking about half-hearted folks, folks that just show up at our door, you know, with a carton of cigarettes saying, I need food.

We have that happen all the time for years. One of the disqualifiers, according to Paul, is a widow that engages in immoral conduct.

Such a person lives for the pleasure of the moment. The passage describes that particular widow as one already dead even while she is living.

Term for being unsaved. Dead in trespasses and sins. She is dead spiritually. She is unregenerate. While the church is under a command to support widows, the church has no command to support the unbelievers.

[20:54] It doesn't mean we can't help someone out. But we're not commanded to do so, particularly long-term. We had a pastor and staff years ago, and people would show up at our door, and one staff guy wanted to buy him a sack of groceries, and the pastor wanted to go out and tell him, go find a job, and the other staff guy wanted to buy him a house.

You know, they could never come and agree. I mean, it was amazing to watch them try to work together. The church must view widows that meet the criteria for widows.

Because support can drain church resources, and so we have to be careful to follow Scripture on this.

But legitimate widows, widows indeed, bring wisdom and experience. And Paul says that is to be shared by them with the younger women.

You know, my wife's been the teaching director for community Bible study now in this town for 15 years. She's actually retiring in May. She's going to keep going to the Bible study, but she's no longer going to be the teaching director.

[22:13] It's going to be interesting at home. Because she devotes Sunday afternoon, Sunday evening, to her Monday study, and then Monday evening, all day Tuesday into the wee hours for her Wednesday study.

And several months ago I came home, and I was tired, and I was late. And I yelled up, I said, hey, I'm going to bed. Okay, I'll see you tomorrow. Okay. I go to bed. And the next night something. I finally went to her and said, we live in this house I haven't seen you in 72 hours.

We figured out we had not seen each other. She was up there. We would, you know, pass in the dark. I don't know, maybe it works out better when you're my age. Widows have a ministry to carry on.

I think of some of our older women in this church that are very capable, experience-wise, to help out our younger women.

Paul talks about the widows that serve in the church, verse 9 and 10. A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than 60 years old.

[23 : 25] So if something happens to me, my wife's qualified. She'll go from being 39 to her real age. Having been the wife of one man, having a reputation for good works, and if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, and if she has devoted herself to every good work.

Pretty tough standards. These make up the list to be a widow qualified to serve in the church.

Those on the list could serve women and children.

And we have some great women serving children and women. I grew up not in a Baptist church, and it was an independent Christian church, and we had a big debate, I remember when I was a kid, about should we have any woman teaching?

And they were talking about two-year-olds and nursery, and shouldn't men be doing that? And my mom, who taught 13 years, said, if we're going to leave it up to men to teach two-year-olds, they won't get taught.

Men can handle about, what, 40 seconds down there in the nursery? And it's time to move on. So here we have the qualified list for widows, the older women, to serve in the church.

[24 : 50] Paul gave similar language in his book to Titus. Listen to Titus 2, verse 3 to 5. Older women, likewise, are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.

And then there's a little footnote that says, don't read this to Phil Donahue, he'll have a heart attack. Great advice. Counsel from Paul. What are some of the things that qualified widows can participate in?

Well, it's an interesting list. We may not all agree with this. I stole this from MacArthur, where I steal most of the good stuff. He says, baptism of women, visiting sick women and children, visiting women prisoners.

And you know that baptism of women, I don't want to get hung up on it. Diane participates in almost every woman baptism. I'm feeding them to the pastor, and she's pulling them out on the other end. It doesn't necessarily, she's in the water.

Visiting women prisoners, teaching younger women, disciplining younger women, disciplining younger women, helping younger women with children, providing hospitality for visitors and strangers, helping place orphans in qualified homes.

[26 : 34] That was huge back in the first century. That last point was very important. Remember, all this is transpiring in the Roman world.

And America did not invent pedophilia, slavery. Orphans often ended up as slaves, gladiators, or prostitutes, male and female.

And let me tell you guys, that's rampant in this world. You remember Rwanda when they had all that? And they left a million orphans. There were pedophiles flying in there from America and Europe by the thousands, buying children to take home with them.

Same thing with that tsunami in Indonesia. They were born just taking kids. Yeah. We had that in this town just three weeks ago on Facebook.

And a 19-year-old was trying to liaison with a 12-year-old, but there were over 50 men had responded to that Facebook, to that 12-year-old. Her mother found it, called us, but by the time we got there, she had deleted it.

[27 : 53] She was so mad. So we lost the names of those 50 men, grown adults, that were interested in that 12-year-old. Something else here is interesting, and that's the age requirement.

A widow had to be not less than 60 years old. That was considered in that world to be an age of retirement, when you were able to sit back and relax.

You know, we're not too far off here, although I'm older than 65. I don't have any plans on it. Diane hasn't given me the green light to retire. Such widows would not be distracted by physical urges. Women that age were also seen as having the time necessary to serve. It was a big deal. The widow must be the wife of one man, and we hear one man, one woman, one woman, man, one

man, woman.

She must be a one-man woman. This does not exclude women who have remarried scripturally. One man woman is a woman devoted to her husband.

[29:04] She was pure with her husband. A loose woman would not be qualified to teach younger women, and it would not be proper for her to do so. In fact, it would be very improper for her to do so.

I'm always amazed at some of the women preachers that we have on TV. Don't get me started. I'm not about to call any names, but Paula White was caught coming out of a hotel room with Benny Hinn.

They admitted they were in Rome, and they said they were there to give money to the Pope. That was their deal. They were making a donation to the Catholic Church, and they were going to visit with the Pope.

I mean, I could have come up with a better story than that, right before Diane slipped my throat.

Paul says, younger widows should remarry. Very interesting.

Verse 11. But refuse to put younger widows on the list, for when they feel sensual desires in disregard of Christ, they want to get married, thus incurring condemnation, because they have set aside their previous pledge.

[30:12] These are the women that are saying, if you'll support me, I'll serve the church, and now they're looking for a husband. They use their time looking for a husband. At the same time, back to Scripture, at the same time, they also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house, and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies.

You didn't know that was in the Bible. talking about things not proper to mention. Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach, for some have already turned aside to follow Satan.

Get a little understanding why Paul's not the favored son of the National Organization for Women. You know, get married, bear children, and keep house.

Wow. I love it. The older, except the bearing children part, for us. The older qualified widows are commanded to serve the Lord by serving the church.

The younger widows are commanded to remarry with the support and encouragement of the church. Younger widows can be given assistance until such time as they remarry.

[31:31] But Paul does not want them on the list to receive permanent assistance. In fact, he tells Timothy, refuse to urge, the urge to put young widows on the list of needs.

Why would Paul say that? Well, primary reason is he's being led by the Holy Spirit to say that. He is concerned that younger widows will have feelings arise in them that are sensual in nature and would be dishonoring to Christ.

Lustful thoughts. Who knows, perhaps even a young widow spots a man that's married and she's wanting to become the wedge. Does that ever happen in America?

Does that probably happen in the Roman world, didn't it? Paul also knows that young widows can lack the maturity necessary to work in the church.

He is worried that they're going to become idle and focus on finding a new husband rather than on service, serving Christ. He also expresses concerns that young widows might be prone to engage in gossip, and that's a big sin in the Bible, and become busybodies.

[32:44] Now, we're familiar with that word gossip. We've heard the word busybody, but, you know, how do we define that? It's an interesting word. It literally means one that moves around.

Well, that doesn't help much. What does that mean? Someone in motion? No. It's someone that sticks his or her nose in somebody else's business. That's a busybody. Probably for the purpose of gossip.

Paul's solution to all of this was for the younger widow to marry, and he wants the church to help her find the suitable husband, and in our passage, this has the force of a command.

Women have the right to remarry if their husband dies or if her divorce was on the proper scriptural grounds. Paul then lists what he wants a younger woman once married to redo.

They're to have children, keep house. Again, I'm sure the National Organization for Women is not considering Paul as their chief spokesman, or I should say spokesperson, because that's a sexist thing that I just did.

[33:53] Paul knew that remarriage was a protection to keep the younger women from falling into sensual sin.

And that would be a reproach to Christ. This would only provide the enemies of Christ with an excuse to attack the church. And folks, they're always looking, aren't they?

We're under the microscope. We're under the microscope. We have seen in the 20th and 21st centuries the far-reaching impact of sexual sin in the church.

We saw it with the Bakers. We saw it with Swaggart. We've seen it since then. And with our communication abilities today, it goes global instantly.

It's instant. In the church at Ephesus, some members were already turning aside to follow Satan.

This was a great burden for Paul.

[34:51] And he spends a lot of time warning Timothy and he'll warn Titus about this phenomenon in the church. People on the church rolls turning aside to follow Satan.

Well, how would they do that? How could that happen? It goes right back to the false teachers.

False teachers had made their headway into the life of the church.

It plagued the Ephesian church. And you can see the end results of that when you get over to the second chapter of the book of Revelation. How about 30 years later and the plague they were in.

Because of their influence, the influence of false prophets, false teachers, some of the younger widows had already violated their oaths to God.

and they had been given over to various sins. Now, we're going to study more of that in 2 Timothy if we ever get there. But that's our plans.

[35:59] And again, I said I'd get you out of here early, but last point, women who are able should assist widows who aren't. I added that. That's kind of a neat deal.

Women who are able should assist widows who aren't. Verse 16, if any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, she must assist them and the church must not be burdened so that it may assist those who are widows indeed.

See, the widows indeed are who we focus on. Just because a woman is a widow, she may have a support system. And Paul says, hey, if you're an older woman out here and your daughter-in-law is his widowed supporter, Ruth was a widow.

Naomi supported her. She lived with her, traveled with her, went to Israel with her, even though she was a Moabite woman, a woman of incest. That's what she was referred to when she went to Israel. Why that? Because of what happened in the cave all the way back in Genesis, you know, with Lot and his two daughters. A woman of incest.

[37:14] That's where the Moabite nation came from, one of those daughters. The church is responsible to assist qualified widows. If men are not available, then the women are to do it.

The women are to do it. And let's face it, there's a lot of situations where they can do it better than we can anyway. There's a lot. By families taking care of widows, the church is not burdened.

The church can then use its resources to help others with legitimate needs. It frees the church up, the finances. The bottom line is that only widows who have no support system should be cared for by the church.

that's the nuts and bolts of it. And let me say to you, helping widows is a great blessing to the church.

It is obvious that God has a very special love for widows. There's testimony to that in the Old Testament, testimony to that in the New Testament, testimony to that from Christ Himself.

[38:27] God has a special love for widows and so should we.