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

Widows in the Church, Part 3
Scripture: 1 Timothy 5:9-10
Code: 54-38

Let's open our Bibles then this morning to 1 Timothy chapter 5. There's a sense in which I regret that this is Thanksgiving weekend because so many people are away. I would venture the guess that about a fourth of our congregation in this service is absent, just looking around. And I only could wish that every one were here for this particular portion, but maybe you can encourage folks to get the tape and get up to speed on this vital section of Paul's epistle to young Timothy.

We're looking at chapter 5 verses 3 through 16 and the subject, the care of widows in the church. Now what we've learned so far and what we've reemphasized is that God has designed women to be cared for by men...either by their fathers or by their husbands or by some man in their household who provides for them. God designed women to be cared for by men in order to be free to fulfill their Goddesigned duty of service both to the family and to the Lord Himself.

Peter instructs every Christian husband with a very basic responsibility. He says this in 1 Peter 3:7, "Live with your wives in an understanding way as with a weaker vessel since she is a woman." God has designed women in such a way to be cared for by men. The idea of weaker vessel is to emphasize her need for protection, provision and care to be offered and sustained by men. Peter further informs that the character of a woman is wrapped up in her being, quote: "Gentle and of a quiet spirit, submissive and calling her husband lord." And again I say, God has designed a woman to be under the care, protection and provision of a man.

Now, of course, in many ways she brings the inward strength to the marriage and he brings the outward strength. He provides on a superficial level in one sense, she provides on a very deep level. As we learn from chapter 2 verse 15, her priority role is to provide influence in the developing life of the children. We all acknowledge that children are a product of the influences primarily of their mother...in those early years of intimate relationship, if indeed a woman provides that in those early years. So God has designed then that women are to be the special care of men who are given that responsibility.

It is interesting, however, that in today's society we have a constant and rather widespread denial of women as the weaker vessel. We have a denial of women as the one to be protected, provided for, and cared for. And the great emphasis today is for a woman to be on her own, independent, and to get out from under that care, I shared with you last week, the net effect of that kind of thinking is to give already ungracious and unsupportive and unfaithful husbands even further latitude because with

women now having all the props knocked out from under them regarding support, men are more free to do what they want. And that often results in them treating women in an unfair, unkind, ungracious and certainly an unbiblical way.

Women need protection. And when society destroys the idea of male protection for women, it leaves women naked, as it were, and left to whatever effects may come upon them in any given culture.

In the Scripture, for example, we find in 1 Corinthians chapter 7, an interesting little discussion that talks about the need for a father or the reality of a father protecting his daughter. It says in 1 Corinthians 7, just reading out of 36 to 38, it says if she should be of full age and it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin, let them marry. Now that interesting verse has to do with a father who has a daughter, she's a virgin daughter, and the Scripture says if she is of a full age, if she is a woman, and if it must be so, that it is necessary for her because of the way she's put together to get married, then he doesn't sin if he lets her marry. Now behind the scene is a father who wants to raise a godly daughter. Somewhere along the way he says, "Well, I want you to dedicate your life to the Lord." While she's young she says, "I'll give you my whole life." She takes a sort of a vow of chastity, if you will, to serve God. Later on when she becomes a woman, she realizes she's not put together to fulfill that vow, she needs a man, she longs for a man. And so the father is saying, "Well do I have a right having made that covenant, or that promise, to then let her get married, am I not breaking that vow?" And the Scripture says no, if you wish to let her get married and it must be so...in other words, it's the way she's put together...then you don't sin, let them get married. The idea is the father made a vow that her daughter would serve the Lord. He had good intent, he wanted to have her use her life in that way. But if she insists on marriage and she is designed for marriage, then he should allow her to do that.

What I want you to note there is that this daughter, until she reaches the age of marriage, is under the direction of her father. It's implied there that the father has to make the decision about whether she can get married. Now when I got married that was really a pretty heavy duty reality. And it was pretty standard fare, just as few years ago as when I was married to 20 some years ago, that you went to the father and you asked permission for the daughter because the daughter was decidedly under the father's care. That's really the reflection of a biblical pattern. And even further in that text there are other indications of the same kind of perspective, that a woman was under the care of her father if she was not under the care of her husband. Just a basic biblical truth.

She remained under the father's care until the father gave her in marriage. The idea of a woman reaching the age of 19, going out and cutting it on her own, living independent of any male support is not known to biblical teaching. I'm not saying in every case it is evil, I'm simply saying it is not a part of biblical culture, where a woman was always protected by her father until she was protected by her husband.

Now if she had lost her husband through desertion, divorce, or death, she then naturally sought a protection. And someone had to come to her aid as the weaker vessel to make sure she was properly cared for, lest she be thrown out to be on her own. How far this is from the advocacy of what we hear today. That is why God has this tremendous compassion on widows because He designed women as weaker vessels to be protected. And when they are unprotected through divorce, desertion, through the death of a husband, and when they are left on their own by that circumstance, they become the special object of God's care. And so when Paul writes to Timothy, he gives this tremendous instruction as to how these women are to be cared for because the church is a reflection of the heart of God. The church has a great responsibility with regard to women left alone by the loss of a husband. And just as the Lord is the special protector, and provider and special strength of widows, and bereft women, so the church is to be the channel of that very same compassion.

When Eliphaz wanted to accuse Job, you remember, he wanted to tell Job why he was having so many problems, he wanted to accuse Job of wickedness, he couldn't really find any sin so he made up a serious sin to try to get Job to realize that all of his pain was a result of his sin. And he accused Job, quote: "You have sent widows away empty," Job 22:9. He was trying to think of the worst thing that a man could possibly do that would qualify him to be under the judgment of God and he said, "I'll tell you what you have done, Job, you must have sent widows away empty." That was thought to be a severe sin when a man did not provide what a widow needed.

When Isaiah indicted the leaders of Israel, he said to them in Isaiah 1:23, "The widows' plea does not come before them." In other words, they don't listen to the widows in need. That is the seriousness of their sin.

Now we do not want to fall into the sins of indifference regarding these people who have great need. We do not want to abuse them. We must be faithful to have the heart of God and show it to women in need, women who need to be protected, women who are as God's design the weaker vessel and in need of male care and protection.

As a result of that and because the world is the way the world is, Paul instructs us as to how to care for widows and women who have lost their husband. Principle number one, let's review, verse 3, is the obligation of the church to support widows. Just a general statement, "Honor" means to support with respect, it means to support financially in every way that they have need. "Support widows," the word means bereft, it means robbed, it means having suffered loss, it means to be alone. It doesn't necessarily mean your husband died, it means you lost him some how some way. The church then has the general responsibility to provide all support necessary for women who have lost their husbands are widows indeed, or who are real widows, or really bereft, really alone. Which means they have no other means of support. The church does not need to support a widow whose husband left her with a fortune or with enough to support her or who has what is necessary coming from family

and friends. The church needs to support those who are real widows, that is truly without any other resource. They are utterly bereft, they are alone, their family does not provide for them. Their husband did not provide for them and their friends do not provide for them.

By the way, alimony which was built into our society up until a few years ago, was a residual reality of biblical influence whereby if a man threw his wife out, as it were, if he dispossessed his wife, would not be able to shirk the responsibility to care for, provide for and support that woman until she was taken up as a support of another man. When we have abolished that under the leadership of the Women's Liberation Movement, we have knocked out the props from under a woman. We have given evil intended men even more reason to dump their wives and we have left the women without support. And that is why you have such a rapid escalation of divorce because the cost is so cheap. There's no cost at all.

The church must look at that kind of woman who is without resources and be to her as God would be, compassionate and supportive of one who has lost her husband. That's the general principle. Second, we not only have the obligation to support widows but secondly, the obligation of the church to evaluate the widows or women needing support. We have to look and find who the widows indeed are. In verse 4 he says the first line of responsibility is children and grandchildren. If any bereft woman, any woman who has lost her husband, has children or grandchildren, let them learn first of all to show their godliness in the home and return to their own parents, for that is good and acceptable before God. That's based on the fifth commandments, "Honor your father and mother, this is good and acceptable in the sight of God." So what is being said here is that the first line of responsibility for a bereft woman is from her children. If she has children, the children or grandchildren ought to make sure that all of her needs are met. She is not to be put, as it were, on the church's list of people to be supported because she is to be supported by her own children who are to return to her a measure of support that she gave to them in their growing years. The first line of responsibility belongs to the family.

But let's assume there is no family in verse 5 and we come across a widow indeed, a genuine widow, she that is a widow indeed or for real and is desolate, literally without anything. Having suffered the loss of all things. Here is a definition of that woman. First of all, she is desolate, she has nothing. Secondly, she has fixed her hope on God. Thirdly, she continues in supplications and prayers night and day. This is the kind of woman the church is to support. One, she has no other means of support coming from family and friends. Two, she is a Christian who has fixed her hope on God. Three, she is a godly woman who is continually before the Lord petitioning and praising Him in prayer. This is the kind of woman that the church is to support, a woman with no resource but a woman who is a godly believing woman. Whether she lost her husband through death, desertion, separation or whatever, divorce, this is the kind of woman the church is to care for who has no other support, is truly desolate and hopes in God and continues in a godly life pattern.

Verse 6, we are to reject the one who lives continually in sensual pleasure, who is spiritually dead while she is physically alive. The church has no obligation to deal with the woman who has devoted her life to unmitigated sensuality. The woman who is spiritually dead who wants to live the way she wants to live, who wants to indulge in sex and vice and fulfill her own desires for comfort and ease and so forth. The church has no obligation to her obviously. In fact, letting her alone and suffering the consequence of her evil intent may be the best thing for her because it might awaken her to the evil of sin and its consequence and bring her to the knowledge of Christ.

Verse 7 he says, "These things...everything he said so far...are to be commanded in order that they, that is that everybody involved, widows and the church and grandchildren and children and everybody involved, are to be without reproach or without blame." In other words, to maintain the reputation of the church, Paul says to Timothy, "Tell the people to abide by these standards."

Then in verse 8 we saw last time, Paul goes back to the matter of family support and the responsibility begins with us and with men. If anyone does not provide for his own, a masculine pronoun. Men, we have the responsibility to provide for our own. The word "his own" or the term "his own" is vague, it means any widows in our network, any widows in our extended family, circle of friends, whatever. Very vague and non specific. Then it says not only are we to provide for our own but a especially for those of his own family. So the idea here is that the first line of support is children and grandchildren. The second line of support is men who know of widows in their extended family or their immediate household. And only after those options have been exhausted does a woman then become the care of the church. And any man who doesn't provide for the women in his own sphere of influence, in his own extended family and in his own household, has denied the faith. In what sense? In the sense of his action he has denied the faith because the faith is all about love and sacrifice and service and he has denied that reality in his action, if not in his mind. And he is worse than an unbeliever because even unbelievers take care of their own.

So this is a wholesale denial of everything the Christian faith means if we do not provide for the women in our own circle of influence and in our own family, our own household who are bereft and alone. Again, may I point out to you the responsibility is a responsibility of male provision for women who are destitute. Now it is also true that some women may have resources to provide for women who are destitute. There may be some wealthy women who could do that and they are dealt with in verse 16 as we'll probably see next week when we get there. But the idea is the first line of responsibility, children and grandchildren. The second line of responsibility, male leadership in a family. The third line of responsibility then becomes women in verse 16, it says women who have widows, that is in their circle of influence, in their family, in their household, are to relieve them if they can so the church isn't charged. And finally, the fourth line of responsibility then falls to the church.

The point is this, we as individual believers are to live out our Christianity. There's no such thing as an institutional Christianity apart from a personal one. My responsibility is not to run around and find all of the bereft women I can and try to get the elders to vote them money out of the budget. My responsibility is to find those women in my circle of influence in the area of my family and my extended network of family who have need and personally make sure that need is provided for and in the event that there are some women who are nobody's responsibility, they become the church's responsibility. So the burden lies not upon the church initially but upon you. Very very important to understand. And not to make such provision is to be an ungrateful child, if it's a matter of a children. Not to make such provision is to be worse than an unbeliever and deny the faith if you're a man who should be providing. And not to make such provision if you're a woman who has resources would be to be disobedient to the Word of God.

So, that sums up all the way down through verse 8, the four phases of provision, starting with children, grandchildren, then men and then some women who may have resources and finally the church takes those for whom there is no other point of support. Now that brings us to verse 9 and there is a shift here in the subject. It's still widows but the purpose of what is said in verses 9 and 10 is distinct. And it's going to be very very potent, I'm quite sure.

The point I want you to note here, first we saw the obligation of the church to support widows. Second, the obligation to make sure we carefully judge the ones we're supporting and go through that process. Thirdly, the obligation of the church to maintain a high standard for those widows who serve in the church. Did you get that? The obligation of the church to maintain a high standard for those widows who serve in the church. Now listen to me for just a moment, carefully. And let me set the scene here.

In the early church, it is apparent and it is apparent implicitly rather than explicitly, that there was in the local church, in the early church, a group of widows who were given a semiofficial or official status as servants of the church. The church had, we know, elders. We saw that back in chapter 3. The church had deacons, both male and female deacons. We saw that also in chapter 3. There was one other sort of quasi official group and that was the older widows. The church had a group of older widows whose responsibility was spiritual ministry to women. They would attend on perhaps the women in baptism. They would be fulfilling the instruction of Titus, "Let the older women teach the younger women." They were a godly group of women who served the church in some officially recognized way. The church actually identified them as such.

In fact, when we look at verses 9 and 10 and read the qualifications, they sound very much like the kind of thing we read about elders and deacons. Listen to verses 9 and 10, "Let not a widow be taken in to the list, or the enrollment or the number, under 60 years old, having been a oneman woman, well reported of for good works, if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good

work." Now there is a list of qualifications for a widow to be put on some kind of list. The list was simply a list of women who worked to serve officially in the church. They were to be out not particularly teaching the Bible, like the men were, not even doing some of the leadership role that the deacons were doing, not even maybe the same as deaconesses who were serving in a helps way, but moving about, assisting Christian women with divine instruction and practical application from home to home. Visiting the sick, visiting the inflicted, visiting the prisoners, assisting young women with the raising of their children, assisting with strangers and visitors and travelers, itinerant preachers, evangelists, whatever, by providing a home for them. These women had a very important role and ministry in the church.

I believe they are a group that have to be reckoned with in the early church. And the list of qualifications sound so much like the qualifications for an elder and deacon that in my mind it supports the idea that they were some kind of an official group. The primary task, as I said, might be counseling young women, it might be working with children, it might be placing orphans in proper homes. We know, for example, that many times children were left in the marketplace in the Roman Empire, very frequently they were left there because their parents didn't want them. And what happened was, the young boys would be taken into a gladiator training program and end up in the arena. And the young girls would be taken into a brothel and some prostitute would raise them in order to fill up all of her rooms with prostitutes. So these little children in the marketplace became either fuel for the very degrading glee of a Roman crowd watching some animal tear them to shreds. Or they became population for a brothel in order to provide sexual favors for the degenerate men of that society. And so these kinds of women would go out and find these little children, very often bring them in, place them in homes. They would care for the sick. They would care for the needy. They were available to move around in that kind of ministry. They would teach hospitality. They served in humble ways in the early church.

Now that's that little sort of group, that group of official servants of the church that were made up of women who had lost their husband. They no longer would spend their time on the home because their children were gone. No longer spending their time on the home because their husband was gone. Now free to do this kind of ministry, and what a vital vital ministry it was. Imagine, if the church today had a group of such women whose total life preoccupation was to move around from home to home and help younger mothers with the process of raising their children. And if those older women were godly, and they had raised godly children, and they had lodged strangers and they had washed the saints' feet and they were always reported of for good works, think of what a tremendous influence they would be on a congregation of younger women. This was God's design. The design was not that when you hit 60 you pack up and go to Palm Springs...or Hawaii or anywhere else. The design was when you lose your husband and you get to be that age, you go into ministry, you move out of your own home and you start moving around to other homes in order that you might instruct them and teach them all the good things that have made the difference in your home. This is a vital area of ministry.

And to be honest with you, it's really been lost to the modern church. And older people nowadays, I think, have the feeling that once they hit a certain age they have a right to indulge themselves until they die...with little thought for any kind of meaningful ministry. The early church, by the way, we know kept that list from this particular passage, but also later on in the third century it shows up again in a writing called the Didiskalia(?) and it shows up again in the fourth century in the apostolic constitution that there was a specially qualified group of bereft women for whom regulations were given by which they were added to that list and put into service for the Lord in the church. They did much charitable work and their sphere of ministry was primarily in the home and with younger women.

Look at Titus 2 for a moment. It says in verse 3, the older women, now this certainly could refer to this group of people among perhaps all older women, but particularly looking at it in the light of these women who were put on a special list, these older women were to maintain behavior that becomes holiness, never be false accusers, not be given to much wine. They were to be teachers of good things and to teach the young women to be sober minded, love their husbands, love their children, to be discreet, to be pure, to be keepers at home, to be good, to be obedient to their husbands that the Word of God be not blasphemed. So here is probably a set of qualifications of ministry that these women were to do. They were to go into the home, they were instructing the younger women, telling them love their husbands, love your children, be chaste, stay at home, keep the home, and all of these things which they had one in their life they had passed on to the next generation.

Now listen carefully to what I say. There is no evidence that these women on this list were necessarily all supported by the church. Or that they were ordained by the leaders in some ordination process. They were simply widows who did this ministry. Some may have been supported by the church if they were widows indeed, some may not have been supported by the church because they were supported by another widow, they were supported by a man in their network family or maybe they were supported by their own children and grandchildren. The issue of support stops at the end of verse 8, and the issue of the widows on the list of those who serve in the church begins in verse 9.

So here you have these widows who serve in the church. The issue of support is not an issue here. Some have tried to say that these women are all fully supported by the church. You don't find that in the text at all. These are just a group of women who serve in the church. The issue of support would only come into play if they had no other means of support.

Now, I want you to look with me in verses 9 and 10 and the qualifications for being a part of this group. Now this is so basic. Here are the qualifications for a woman reaching sixty, having lost her husband to be put on this list, to be added to this group. Qualification number one, verse 9, "Let not a widow be enrolled or put on the list unless she's over sixty." That's the idea. It starts with being over sixty. Now there's nothing said here about support, as I said before. If you try to equate the two, and

some people have tried to do that. They've tried to say, "Well the only widows a church is to support are the ones that are over sixty." That's not true. That's not true at all. We have just said that the widows who are to be supported are any women who are without a husband and without support. There's no age qualification. The age qualification comes for the widows who are put on this list of official servants in the church, not the ones that are supported by the church. The church is to take up the care and demonstrate the compassion of God to any woman who has lost her husband whatever age she is and make sure that her needs are met.

But when it comes to that official group of women who serve in the church, they have to be over sixty. There's no age limit placed on the support issue. And I want you to understand that.

Now why sixty? It seems like an unusual thing, doesn't it? To just drop sixty in there, what about sixtyone, fiftynine, sixtythree, fiftyeight? Why sixty? That's a general idea, that's just a general point of reference. For example, if you go into ancient times you find that Plato in his plan for the ideal state taught that sixty was the right age for people to become priests and priestesses. In the east, in that part of the world, sixty was the age to retire from activity and engage in a life of philosophical contemplation. In the Roman Empire, sixty was the recognized age when a person was considered old because sexual passion was thought to wane at age sixty. And it may have been more common then than it is now because sexual attitudes have changed through the centuries. But these women were assumed to be women who were older. They were not driven by their sexual desires. They were mature in spirit and in experience. The key idea is they would be very unlikely to remarry. That's the key idea. They would be very unlikely to remarry. They would be very content to live out their life without conjugal relationships.

And this was very important because here's the typical scenario, right? A godly woman who spent all her life in spiritual ministry, who has washed the saints' feet, raised godly children, done all these good works, loses her husband. Having lost her husband she's drawn to the Lord because of the strength of that relationship. And in her covenant to the Lord and the faithfulness of all those years to her husband, she can't really conceive of marrying another man. That's very difficult for her because she's lived with this one man. And so because of her love for the Lord, because she's older now and her children are grown, she says to the Lord, "Lord, I'll give the rest of my life to you." Maybe even if her children are young, she's lost the man of her love and she says I'll just give You my life.

In a little while she begins to feel the desire for a husband. She meant what she said when she said it but she's sorry she said it. So let's assume she comes to the church and let's say she's 35 years old or 40 or whatever and she says, "I want to give the rest of my life to the Lord. You know, my husband is gone and I loved him and him alone. And now that he's gone, I just want to give the rest of my life to serve the Lord." And in about two years she's got a real problem. She has strong physical desires. She wants to get married. She is going around from house to house and that just makes it worse and worse and worse because she keeps seeing happy marriages and home life. And every man she

sees turns on lights in her head and she becomes very very vulnerable to an unhappy husband while she's on the circuit, as it were. And then enters compromise. She begins to want to court somebody or date somebody. And that kind of filters in to this whole thing and she's trying to serve the Lord and be pure and godly and full of virtue and teach women to be chaste and teach women to love their husbands and teach women to be content at home. And she's discontent. The whole thing just isn't right.

And it may even lead to the fact that she starts to panic a little bit and settles for marrying an unbeliever. And the whole issue here is, look, don't put a young woman who may have the desire later if not now to get married in the official situation of being a servant of the church, out there doing spiritual ministry, because it may be very difficult, it may be a compromising environment in which she is living and it may ultimately end in disaster and that will bring disrepute upon the church. Don't do that.

That's why in verse 11 it says, "The younger widows, don't put them on the list because they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they'll want to marry." Literally, they will wish to marry. That's the issue. What you want on the list, listen carefully, are women who have the time and maturity, who have the character and reputation, who have the compassion to serve without any thought of ever wanting to marry again. That's the idea. Don't put a young woman on that servant's list or she's going to compromise herself running around from house to house. She's going to see some guy out there she likes when her sexual passions are aroused and you're going to have a problem on your hands. Don't turn her loose in the community because there's a lot of men out there who will take advantage of that.

Boy, that's a picture of what our society does, isn't it? Single people running all over everywhere. Unprotected women and lecherous evil intended men. So, this woman, first of all, is to be mature enough to as not to seek to remarry, so that when she makes a commitment to serve the Lord she has no desire to turn on that commitment and she's old enough not to be lured by men who may lure her and not to be constantly beset by the lack of a conjugal relationship.

Second principle, it says in verse 9, she is to have been a oneman woman. That's exactly the same construction that we saw back in chapter 3 regarding elders and deacons. It doesn't mean that she's only been married once because in verse 14 he says, "I want younger widows to remarry." There's no sin there. In 1 Corinthians 7:39 he says, "A widow should marry again in the Lord." What it means is a oneman woman is a woman who was totally devoted to the man she was married to. It's talking about purity of action and purity of attitude. She lived in complete fidelity with her husband. She was chaste, she was pure, she had an unspotted marriage relationship.

So what kind of woman goes on the list? A woman who is mature and a woman who has lived her life in a chaste way, faithful to the husband she had. Verse 10 adds a third qualification. She is to be

literally having a reputation for good works, well reported of for good works. She is to have a reputation for good works. What do we mean by that? Well it's common knowledge the kind of woman she is. Her reputation is one of nobility. She has a reputation for kalos, excellence. She is reputed to be a woman of excellent character. It's just like it says a bishop is to be blameless, just like it says of a deacon, he is to be a man of quality, a onewoman man, verse 12 of chapter 3, who rules well his own house and so forth. He is to be, back in verse 10, blameless. An elder is to be without reproach, a deacon is to be without reproach. This woman put on this list is to be a woman without reproach. She has a reputation among all people for nobility in the spiritual dimension. She is externally good. Her life characteristic is good.

You will also notice that at the end of verse 10 she diligently follows every good work. She is good and she does good. This is what she must be in order to qualify...a righteous, Christhonoring, Godglorifying woman.

Now what does this mean? What do you mean "well reported of for good works?" Well he gives five subpoints, okay? These are very important. Five areas are then specified as to the specific goodness of this godly woman. It's a checklist, women, it is a checklist. And it's a checklist, men, as well for the kind of woman that God would have. Here is the profile of a godly woman. You can look at Proverbs 31 and see a profile of a godly woman, but you can look right here in verse 10 and see it also. Here is a woman who is equipped to be enrolled to serve as a standard, as a model for younger women. This is the kind of woman you put on the role because this is the kind of woman you want all the rest of your women to be. Okay? This is the kind of character God exalts.

Number one, follow this one, verse 10, "IF she has brought up...what?...children." I cannot emphasize to you too strongly how important this is. If she has brought up children. The idea here is a very unusual word. It basically means to nourish children. This sees her as a Christian mother, bearing and raising children in a godly home. This is the greatest single privilege of a woman. Now please when I say that understand that that does not mean that a woman who is not given the privilege of having children because she cannot, or a woman whom God has given the gift of singleness is a lesser woman, it is that this is the norm and this is the general pattern and God has His design for those who are exceptions to that. And that does not discount them. First Corinthians chapter 7 exalts a single person, talking about how they can be devoted to the Lord without the cares of the world that are brought about by children and family. But nonetheless, the norm and the general principle is that when you're looking for a godly woman with an excellent noble reputation, the first thing on the list is has she nourished children? And the idea here is right back in 2:15, has she brought up children in faith and love and holiness with a sound mind? Has she raised godly children? That's the kind of woman you want moving around the community, giving instruction to your younger mothers, your younger wives.

Very basic. This is the kind of woman that I read to you earlier in Titus 2 who is able to teach young women to know their priorities, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, pure, keepers of the home, good, obedient to their own husbands that the Word of God be not blasphemed. Submissive like Sarah who called Abraham lord, 1 Peter 3 said. These are the kind of women who can teach the younger women. To have done this well was necessary. The children would normally be her own but it may have been that she raised some orphans as well.

Secondly, verse 10 says in this little five features under the idea of her reputation, first of all, she has nourished children. Secondly, if she has lodged strangers, or literally if she's shown hospitality to strangers. If she has received strangers. If she's had an open home and maintained hospitality to people, not to people she knew but to people she didn't know. And let's face it, we husbands may invite and we may host the guests, but the work is carried on by the women. And we are all from time to time reminded of that just in case we forget. And I will go to glory deeply grateful for my own dear wife because there's rarely a night and rarely a day in our home when we are not hosting some guest. Sometimes we know them well. Sometimes we know them but casually. Sometimes we don't know them at all. And inevitably while I may carry on the conversation, she's left with the bulk of duties. And I have encouraged her with the fact that when I die and go to heaven, somebody will put her on the list. She doesn't necessarily look forward to that prospect. She would just as soon we go together. Well, whatever the Lord has in mind.

Sacrificial devotion to the needs of people she doesn't know. Boy, that's a tremendous character quality. Somebody said to me recently, our society seems to think that a woman's place is in the mall. And it's not far from wrong. I've often wondered if we ever got back to that sort of biblical axiom that a woman's place is in the home, what tremendous things could be accomplished for the Kingdom if the concentration was put where God intended it to be put. Sacrificial devotion to the needs of people she knows, sacrificial devotion to the needs of people she doesn't know. In that day passengers, messengers, missionaries, Christians and itinerant evangelists and preachers were moving all the time and it was a wonderful opportunity for a woman to be gracious to them. It says of Phoebe in Romans 16:1 that she was to be commended as a servant of the church at Cenchrea, that you receive her in the Lord as becometh saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you for she's been a helper of many and of myself also. No doubt this dear woman opened her home and allowed those who were traveling for the sake of the gospel to share in the bounty that she could provide.

Now please note here, a woman who could do this does not necessarily have to be a destitute woman. So the idea that this group of people over sixty are all totally destitute and are on the welfare list of the church is just not so. There would be many women who all their life may have supported strangers. And when they lost their husband they may still have had the resources left to them by their husbands to continue doing that. Those resources might still have been there. But the point is, this is a woman who has given herself away in ministry to others all her life and that qualifies her to

give herself away in ministry at this point when she reaches the age of sixty and is free from the responsibilities and duties of the home as she once had done.

Thirdly, and this follows the same idea, verse 10, "If she has washed the saints' feet." The duty of a slave was to wash the dirty and dusty feet of people who wore sandals and all the roads were either dust or mud, it was either dry or wet. And people's feet were washed when they came into a home always and when they reclined at supper, it was obviously a necessity to do that. So this was a literal menial humble task. Now it doesn't mean that this women literally had to do that all the time. She may have had a servant in the house that did that. But it became a euphemism for a woman with a humble spirit, a woman with a humble heart who was willing to do that, and certainly on occasion she did that, but she showed herself as a humble servant.

You remember Jesus in John 13 washed the disciples feet. And He said, "You do to others what I've done to you." It isn't just as simple as washing feet, it is as simple as seeing a person have a need no matter how humbling meeting that need is, humble yourself and do it. So here is the character of a godly woman. This is a woman who has raised godly children. This is a woman who has opened her home to care for people who were in need. This is a woman who has done the most humble menial service rendered to someone else. She spent her life helping people, service at personal inconvenience, service with humility. No prominence, no selfexaltation.

Fourthly, if she has relieved the afflicted. That simply means if she has assisted people in trouble. The word "afflicted" has to do with pressure put on people. Those under pressure, mental pressure, physical pressure, emotional pressure, whatever kind of pressure. Has she helped, aided, assisted people in trouble under pressure? Has she spent her life as a helper of other people? You notice it doesn't say anything about where she went to school or where she graduated or where she worked or what her wardrobe looked like or how fancy her home was decorated. It doesn't say anything like that. How great a chef she was. It just talks about the beauty and the wonder of her humble gracious spirit of service. Has she raised godly children? Has she washed the feet of the saints? Has she relieved those people who are in trouble? Has she shown hospitality to strangers?

The word "relieved" by the way appears only here and in verse 16. And if you tie with verse 16, it has to do with money, support. The widow in verse 16 is supporting other widows. So the idea is has she given money? Resources for life? It might be meals, it might be housing, it might be counsel, it might be guidance, it might be service in sickness or death. It could be many things. Has she assisted people in trouble? Has she reached out to people in need or is she spending all her time on herself?

Finally, if she has diligently followed every good work. If she's devoted herself totally to every good work, that's the idea. Strong, strong verb. Has she actively pursued every good work? Like that beautiful lady in chapter 9 who made all the clothes for the widows and when she died all the widows were all over the place crying like mad because the lady who provided everything for them is dead.

And Peter raised her from the dead and gave her back to the widows. Remember that, Dorcas?

Now listen carefully as we wrap this up. All these reveal the required character and proper preparation for a woman to be placed on the list of servants in the church. Has she cared for children? Cared for orphans? Loved strangers? Served humbly? Aided the troubled? And has her life been a constant flow of good deeds? Has she diligently pursued those things? A godly woman. If she has spent her life doing those things, then put her on that list and send her out to minister.

Now the sum of all that, listen carefully to me, is this. If that's the kind of woman who is put on the list to serve the church, then that's the kind of woman every woman ought to be and desire to be. That's the point. The standard for the women on this list then becomes the goal of every woman to be that kind of woman. This is how every Christian woman should seek to live, so when the day comes for her to be considered for service to her Lord's church, she will be qualified. These become the older women who can teach the younger. These become the women who raise up a godly generation. This is the priority for a woman's life. And I'm telling you how tragic, how tragic it is that the world has deceived womanhood today as to what they're to be. This is how women change the world.

I want to close with this story, beautiful story. Ian McClaren(?), Scottish preacher, great Scottish preacher, told a story about a woman in his congregation. It's just beautiful. He went to visit this little lady, lived in a little cottage. And as they were talking she began to weep and then she began to wipe the tears with the corner of her apron. So Dr. McClaren said, "What's disturbing you, dear?"

"Oh," she said, "sometimes I feel I have done so little and when I think about it, it makes my heart heavy because really I've done so little for Jesus. When I was a wee girl the Lord spoke to my heart and I surrendered my life to Him. And I wanted to live for Him oh so much," she said. "But I feel my life is gone and I haven't really done anything."

Ian McClaren said, "What have you done with your life?"

"Oh nothing," she said. "Really nothing. I've washed dishes. I've cooked three meals a day. I've taken care of my children. I've mopped the floor. I've mended the clothes. You know, everything a mother does, that's all I've done."

McClaren sat back in his chair and said, "Where are your boys?"

"Oh," she spoke, "you know, you know I named them all for the gospels...Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. You know them all, and you know where Mark is. You ordained him. He went to China. He's learned the language and now he's able to minister to the people in the name of the Lord."

"Where's Luke?" McClaren said.

"You know well enough where Luke is because you sent him out and I had a letter from him the other day. He's in Africa and he says a revival has broken out on his mission station."

"And Matthew?" he asked.

"Well, he's with his brother in China and they're working together." And then she volunteered, "And John, he's only 19 and he came to me last night to say God has laid Africa on his heart. He said, `Mother, I'm going to Africa, but don't worry or cry about it because the Lord has shown me that I am to stay with you until you go home to glory and then I'll go to Africa, but until then I want to take care of you."

Ian McClaren looked at that elderly saint and said, "Your life has been wasted, you say?" Through her tears she said, "Yes, I fear it's been wasted."

"You have been cooking and mopping and washing, but," he said, "I would like to see the reward you receive when you get called home."

Let's bow in prayer.

Father, we live in a lying society that has robbed us of true virtue and power and has given us a false image of a godly women. The kind of woman to serve the church, the kind to bring honor to Your name, the kind of woman to change the generation at its knee is so described in Your precious Word. A woman who is a oneman woman, who has a reputation for excellence, who has brought up children in the Lord, shown hospitality to strangers, served in inconvenienced selfeffacing humility, spent her life assisting people in affliction and pursued with all her strength every good thing. God may You give us such women to the glory of Your name. And may we be faithful to care for such women in their time of need. And for all those women who having suffered loss, need someone to demonstrate Your compassion and care for them. We thank You for the exalting truth of Your design for the wonder and the beauty of womanhood. In Christ's name. Amen.

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