

10. Learning When the Church Is to Provide for Widows

In our last topic, we saw that we are to help our physical and spiritual children learn to show respect for older people and especially older individuals from their own family. We saw that we are to meet the needs of family members who are a part of our household. We also saw that there are some widows and other elderly Christians who have no family to provide for their needs. That is an opportunity for the church to meet the needs of those individuals. Today, we are going to see when the church is to provide for the needs of the widows that have no family.

There was an age qualification that a church was to consider as it made arrangements to supply the needs of the widows. 1 Timothy 5:9-10 says, “Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, *and not unless* she has been the wife of one man, well reported 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.” In the New Testament times, a widow that was sixty or more years in age seldom had an opportunity to marry another husband. As a result, the church was to consider this as the age when they would start to support widows that had no family.

Some widows were also to have the opportunity for a special ministry to the younger women and were to be put on a special list of ministering widows. Titus 2:3-5 says, “The older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.” Here, we see that these older women were given a special ministry of teaching younger women. The characteristics to be on this list were such that they could lead younger women by example as well as by what they taught the younger women.

Like the qualifications that were given for elders who provide leadership to the church, we see that such a widow was to be a one-man woman. This meant that she was a good example because she had been faithful to her husband in her thoughts, attitudes, words and actions. She was to be a woman that was known for her good works. Dorcas was such a woman. Acts 9:39 says, “Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought *him* to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them.” Here, we see that she had been known for her good works to help other widows.

Another way that such a woman ministered was by the way that she had brought up children. This normally spoke of those who had brought up physical children. However, a woman like Priscilla might only have had spiritual children. Acts 18:26 says, “So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.” Here, we see that Apollos was an adult who needed some spiritual parents to help him understand the way of God more accurately. Many widows have had a similar ministry. Whether physical or spiritual children, these would be children that were serving the Lord in other places.

The next way that some women ministered to others was by lodging strangers. Here, we see that this talks about a woman who has used her home as a place of ministry. 1 Peter 4:9 says, “*Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.*” In the time of the New Testament, many places did not have an inn where people could stay. As a result, Christians who were traveling from one area to another would often be invited by other Christians to stay with them as they traveled even though the travelers might be strangers.

Women also ministered by washing the feet of the saints. In wealthy homes, servants were often the ones who washed the feet of others. However, many people did not have servants. Here, we see that godly women often followed the example of Christ when He washed the feet of His disciples. Christ said in John 13:13-15, ““You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for *so* I am. If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.” Here, we see that widows in the church who had followed the example of Christ were showing an attitude of humility.

Other women had shown an attitude of humility as they ministered to the afflicted. James 1:27 says, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” Now that these women were widows themselves and no longer had family responsibilities, they were women who already had been ministering to other Christians in this way. Since the word “afflicted” can speak about any type of trouble or distress, women have ministered in many different ways to meet the needs of the afflicted.

Finally, there were widows who had imitated the example of Christ by doing good whenever they had the opportunity to do good. When Peter talked about Christ in the house of Cornelius, he said in Acts 10:38, ““How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.”” Here, we see that Christ went about doing good. Galatians 6:9-10 says, “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” In addition to helping our children develop a concern for the widows, we want to help them learn to do the things that we see the godly women had done before they became widows.

In contrast, we see that many younger widows had chosen to do other things. 1 Timothy 5:11-13 says, “But refuse *the* younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. And besides they learn *to be* idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not.” Here, we see why younger widows were not to be put on this special list of widows. The word that is translated, “they have begun to grow wanton against Christ” means that *when they begin to feel the impulses of sensual desires* younger widows might develop a strong desire to get married again. In other cases, if the church was supporting them, some would cast off their first faith.

If the church provided support for young widows that were in good health, it would be easy for them to learn habits that could hurt the church. The word that is translated “learn” means *to learn by practice*. Here, we see four sinful habits that individuals can learn when they have a lot of extra time because others provide for their needs. First, we see that some individuals can learn to be lazy (idle). Second, some just begin to wander from house to house. Third, some begin to gossip. Fourth, some do not mind their own business. As a result, such individuals begin to talk about others and say things about others that are not proper.

As a result, Paul gave instructions to the younger widows. 1 Timothy 5:14-16 says, “Therefore I desire that *the* younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. For some have already turned aside after Satan. If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows.” Here, we see that Paul realized many younger widows would eventually desire to marry again rather than remain as a widow. He wanted them to be free to marry again. He wanted them to have the opportunity to have children. The word that is translated “manage the house” means *to rule the household*. Here, we see that a wife has the responsibility for the oversight of the household. The goal for all women was that they would not cause those who were not Christians to speak evil of the Lord.

We see that when Paul wrote this letter to Timothy there were already some widows who had turned aside after Satan. In 1 Timothy 1:6, we read, “From which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk.” Some of the younger widows were among those who had turned aside to idle talk. 2 Timothy 4:4 says, “And they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” In the future, Paul realized that some young widows would turn from the truth to stories that false teachers told. In our next topic, we see that some younger men will also turn aside from the truth because of their sinful desires.

The older widows were to be put on the list because their lives had shown that they had become qualified for spiritual leadership among the women just as the elders and deacons had become qualified for spiritual leadership for the church. As a result, Paul gave a summary of how these older women should be supported. If a Christian man or woman had family members that needed someone to supply their needs, these Christians were to take the responsibility for the widows in their family. The church was not to have such a heavy load that it would become weighed down. Instead, the church was to be able to support those widows who had no family members to support them. That way, the church would be able to meet the needs of those who were really widows because they had no family to support them. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to explain and apply this passage both to widows within their own families and also to help the church learn to provide for the needs of widows who have no one to provide for their physical and spiritual needs. May the Lord richly bless you as you help you children learn to understand when the church is to provide for the widows.