

God's Special Women – Widows

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One of the things that strikes me in the last six months or so, maybe a little longer, is that we've had several new widows created in the Church. You know Marie Di Salvo lost Joe and Carol Tiechen, a lady in our hometown—she's in a different fellowship—but lost her husband Gene. And then Joyce Rau lost Lauren. And another lady in our town, who can't come to services but watches DVD's, Carol Robey, lost her husband Duncan here just a very short time ago. So again, we've had four new widows in the last several months. And then obviously, we can look back in months prior to that and over the last several years, there have been many widows created over the last several years.

And many of those widows are not going to be able to make it to the Feast this year—and that's a sad thing—either through health or other cases beyond their control. But if you put yourself in a widow's position, not being able to go to the Feast, that's not an enviable thing. And they obviously wish they could be at the Feast.

And the fact is that older people, who are alone, have a very, very difficult existence today, particularly women. If they're alone in this society, it can be very, very difficult because many have been deserted by their families. And many, if not most, have been deserted by their government. And if their families are not there and they're out in the world, it's a very difficult situation and they don't have a lot of safety nets to help them. But this was prophesied in the Bible to occur to Israel in the latter days!

Let's go to Ezekiel chapter 22 and see this prophecy. Ezekiel 22 and we're going to read verses 23 through 25. Ezekiel 22 talking about a prophecy regarding widows in modern day Israel. Ezekiel 22 verse 23:

Ezekiel 22:23. *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 24) "Son of man, say to her: (KJV)*

Now that's referring to Israel up in verse 18.

Ezekiel 22:24b. *[You are] the land that is not cleansed, (KJV)*

And boy, our land is not cleansed! It is ugly and dirty.

Ezekiel 22:24b. *nor rained upon in the day of indignation. 25) There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the [middle] thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have devoured [lives]; they have taken the treasure and precious things; (KJV)*

Notice this last phrase!

Ezekiel 22:25b. *they have made her many widows in the midst thereof [referring to Israel.] (KJV)*

We know prophecy is dual. There is an early fulfillment and a latter fulfillment. There's a physical fulfillment and a spiritual fulfillment. And certainly in the Church today in modern Israel, there have been many widows created. The fact is that most men die before the women. The fact is that most men work themselves to death and leave their wives alone and then some, in many cases in the world, destitute—shouldn't be in the Church, but in the world.

And the fact is that in the Church, many widows feel that once their husband dies, once they're no longer a couple, somehow they feel that they have no value anymore. And that somehow they're a burden on the Church or on society. And now that they're alone, they can no longer contribute to the Church or serve the brethren or certainly give tithes or offerings or whatever. And in the Church, it's sad to say that too many in the Church—and I'm speaking the greater Church now all over the world—ignore the widows and ignore their plight and don't feel for the widows or even give it a second thought of what they are going through.

So what we're going to do in the sermon today is we're going to answer three questions about widows. The first one and the most important we're going to ask the question and answer it.

I. How does God view widows? Are widows second-class Christians? Are they just kind of kicked to the curb? Or does God have something else in mind for them?

The second question we're going to answer is:

II. What is our responsibility as Church members, as brothers and sisters, what is our responsibility toward widows in the Church? Do we have a responsibility toward them? What does God say about that?

And then the third question we want to ask and answer is directed at the widows.

III. What are the responsibilities of the widows toward others in the Church? Do they just get a free pass and just kind of soak up things? Or are they isolated and all alone and don't have any responsibilities? Or does God want them to have a certain role and fulfill a certain role in the Church today?

We'll answer those three questions. And what I hope when we finish and when we're through with that, we will learn a lot about God by the way He wants the widows treated. We will learn a lot about the nature of God and God's love by how He wants widows treated and how He views widows.

Okay, let's start off with the first question.

I. How does God view widows?

The fact is that widows are very, very special to God. He doesn't kick them to the curb. He doesn't ignore them. They are very special. Let's go to Psalms 68 and verse 5. In fact, they are so special to Him; God says that "I am going to take care of them! I'm going to look after them." Psalm 68 and verse 5, I'm going to read it out of the NIV. Notice what Christ, the God of the Old Testament, says:

Psalm 68:5. *A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. (NIV)*

And God understands that the widow and the infant and the fatherless child are the three most vulnerable groups in the Church because they cannot defend themselves. They cannot in most cases provide for themselves—the infant, the fatherless child, and the widow. And you will see over and over again in the Bible that God talks about those three and puts them together. Now we're going to focus on widows, but you're going to notice that the fatherless child is there too. And in many cases, the stranger is there too, the stranger in the land.

Now let's look back at ancient Israel and we're going to see through the Scriptures we're going to look at that God raised widowhood to a higher level than any other society in the history of mankind. I'll say it again: God raised the status of widows or widowhood to a higher level than any other society that has ever existed. God says that the widows are special to Him and if they cry out to Him, He is going to hear.

Let's go to Exodus chapter 22 and we're going to read verses 22 through 24. Exodus 22 verses 22 through 24, notice what God says. He is very emphatic about this. He doesn't pull any punches. And we need to take heed to what He says. Exodus 22 verse 22, He says:

Exodus 22:22. *[You] shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. 23) If [you] afflict them in [anyway], and they cry [to] me, I will surely hear their cry; (KJV)*

That's a promise from God! Verse 24, notice what happens to somebody who afflicts the widow.

Exodus 22:24. *And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; [to the point that] your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless. (KJV)*

God is that serious about taking care of the widows. And the widows who are listening to this, if you cry to God, you can rest assured that God will hear you!

God also says emphatically that He is going to provide for His widows. Let's go to Deuteronomy chapter 24. Moses is giving Israel final instructions before they go into the Promised Land and before he dies. And in Deuteronomy 24, we're going to read verses 19 through 22 and notice what he says, what Moses is instructing Israel to do regarding widows. Deuteronomy 24 verse 19:

Deuteronomy 24:19. *When [you cut] down [your] harvest in [your] field, and [you have forgotten] a sheaf in the field, [He says, don't] go [back to pick it up]: [He says, leave it there] for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: (KJV)*

Those vulnerable three groups of people!

Deuteronomy 24:19b. *that the LORD [your] God may bless [you] in all the work of [your] hands. (KJV)*

If you allow some extra for the widow, God is going to bless you. That's a promise! Verse 20:

Deuteronomy 24:20. *When [you beat your] olive tree, (KJV)*

We might relate it to apple trees out here today. He says:

Deuteronomy 24:20b. *[you shall] not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. (KJV)*

We have an apple orchard right across the street and those harvesters go through there and they will leave some apples on the trees. They're just in a rush; they're going fast. Lots of apples fall to the ground during the harvesting process. And we would be admonished today, "You don't go back and go through it a second time. Just leave them." Then the widows, the fatherless children can go through the fields and glean what's left.

Verse 21:

Deuteronomy 24:21. *When [you gather] the grapes of [your] vineyard, [you shall] not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. 22) And [you shall] remember (KJV)*

What are we supposed to remember?

Deuteronomy 24:22b. *that [you were] a bondman in the land of Egypt: therefore I command [you] to do this thing. (KJV)*

So what He's saying is "If you remember that you were in Egypt, what were you in Egypt? You were slaves." And so God is drawing an analogy that the widow is like a slave. Meaning a slave is totally dependent on others for every aspect of their life. And widows are in that same category in many, many cases. That's why those who have abundance need to set some aside or in the field leave some. Don't go through a second time to provide for the widows.

Let's jump now to Psalm 146 and verse 9. Notice what He says. God's attitude toward widows, how God views widows, and I hope the widows when they read these Scriptures are very encouraged by this. Psalm 146 verse 9, it tells us; it says:

Psalm 146:9. *The LORD [preserves] the strangers [the foreigners]; he [relieves] the fatherless and widow: (KJV)*

Now the word "relieve" is obviously translated "relieves" meaning to remove distress. But it also can be translated "restore."

So what God is saying, He's says: "I'm going to relieve the widows from any trouble. And I will restore them to what they need. I will provide for them." He says:

Psalm 146:9b. *but the way of the wicked he [turns] upside down. (KJV)*

Widows have a very special place in the heart of God.

Now let's go to Deuteronomy chapter 14 and here we read of something that God instituted in part directly just for widows! He cares about them so much; He loves them so much; He understands their plight so much that He has directed a special tithe for the widows. Deuteronomy 14, we'll read verses 28 and 19.

Deuteronomy 14:28. *At the end of three years (KJV)*

Referring to what we commonly call the "Third Tithe."

Deuteronomy 14:28b. *[you shall] bring forth all the tithe of [your] increase the same year, and [shall] lay it up within [your] gates: 29) And the Levite, (because he [has] no part nor inheritance with [you],) and the stranger, and the fatherless, [and notice this] and the widow, which are within [your] gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; (KJV)*

Now we know back in those days, the tithe was primarily in the form of produce or animals. And so, those were brought and distributed to the widows and the fatherless and the stranger. But just understand the widows were provided for because of third tithe. And noting the end of that last verse, He says, "You do that":

Deuteronomy 14:29b. *that the LORD [your] God may bless [you] in all the work of [your hands] which [you do]. (KJV)*

You want to be blessed, look after the widow. Take care of the widow and provide for the widow.

Now the third tithe provides for women with no husband so that they can rear their children at home. And the children then can be a benefit to society and not a detriment. Because we read all too often that there's a single mom and this society forces her to work. And then she has latchkey children. And often as not, those children with nobody at home turn to gangs, turn to drugs, turn to alcohol, turn to crime, because there's nobody there. And one of the benefits of third tithe, it allows the mother, if she's a younger widow, to stay at home and take care of her children.

And yet some widows feel guilty about taking third tithe. They should not! It's designed for them. It's for them.

And the third tithe provides for elderly widows who can't work, elderly widows who might be infirm. But these elderly widows have spent all of their lives contributing to society and so therefore, it is not wrong for them to take some help and assistance from the society that they've contributed to or from the Church that they have contributed to could be for decades.

Now let's look at an example in the Old Testament about the treatment of a widow. This is the example of Boaz in the Book of Ruth. Let's go to Ruth now and we're going to go to chapter 2 and we're going to read verses 4 through 9 and then 15 and 16. I'm going to read it out of the New King James because it is easier to understand and more to the point. But understand that Ruth is a Moabitess. She's not an Israelite. She came back to Israel with Naomi. Ruth 2 verse 4:

Ruth 2:4. Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said to [his] reapers, "The LORD be with you!" And they answered him, "The LORD bless you!" (NKJ)

So obviously this says something about Boaz. He is a man of God. He cares about his employees. He cares about his workers in the field. He pronounces a blessing on them and they care enough and love him enough to respond in kind.

Verse 5:

Ruth 2:5. Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?" 6) So the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered and said, "[This] is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. 7) "And she said [referring to Ruth], 'Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.'" (NKJ)

She wanted to provide for her mother-in-law and herself.

Ruth 2:7b. So she came and has continued from morning until now, though she rested a little in the house." (NKJ)

Now notice Boaz's response. Verse 8:

Ruth 2:8. Then Boaz said to Ruth, "You will listen, my daughter, will you not? Do not go to glean in another field, nor go from here, but stay close [to] my young women. (NKJ)

That says Boaz was concerned that if she went to another field, you never know something might happen to her. But he was confident that if she stayed in his fields with his employees that she would not be harmed and she would be taken care of.

Verse 9, notice this!

Ruth 2:9. *"Let your eyes be on the field which they reap [meaning his reapers], and go after them. Have I not commanded the young men not to touch you? (NKJ)*

That could have been a problem in another field. He says:

Ruth 2:9b. *And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn." (NKJ)*

So he's instructed the young men to give her water to provide for her.

Verse 15, remember she's a Moabitess. She's not a native Israelite. Verse 15:

Ruth 2:15. *And when she rose up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. (NKJ)*

In other words, don't just let her get the droppings, but let her go ahead and harvest right beside you and get some of the sheaves.

Verse 16:

Ruth 2:16. *"Also let grain from the bundles fall purposely for her; leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her." (NKJ)*

So Boaz is even going above and beyond to take care of Ruth and her mother-in-law. And that's an attitude that all of us in God's Church with God's spirit, which is the spirit of love, would do well to emulate. Again, we're talking about how God views widows.

Let's understand too that God is going to punish Israel, is punishing Israel for ignoring or taking advantage of widows. And this government down through the years is more interested in getting politicians re-elected than taking care of the people that need it. And the whole country is paying a price for this, as we all know.

Let's go to Deuteronomy chapter 10. We're going to read verses 17 and 18. God is very explicit—and we're only covering a fraction of the Scriptures—but God is very explicit that you don't take advantage of widows. You provide for them. You look after them. Deuteronomy 10 verses 17 and 18, again Moses is giving his final message to the nation of Israel.

Deuteronomy 10:17. *For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which [regards] not persons, nor [takes] reward: (KJV)*

God cannot be bribed. God is not a respecter of persons. Verse 18:

Deuteronomy 10:18. *He [does] execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, (KJV)*

The NIV says of verse 18:

Deuteronomy 10:18. *He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, (NIV)*

That means God has to know about the widow and know about what she needs and know about her cause and once He does, then He will defend her if she needs defending. And we don't want to be on the receiving end of God's wrath. This nation is and will be more so as time goes on.

Let's jump to chapter 27 and read verse 19. Again, we're just hitting the high spots. There are many other Scriptures that we could read. I'm going to read this out of the New King James. Notice what God says. He pronounces a curse on those who would mess around with a widow.

Deuteronomy 27:19. *'Cursed is the one who perverts the justice due [to] the stranger, the fatherless, and widow.'* (NKJ)

Justice, fairness, what is right! He said, "You are cursed if you pervert that!"

Deuteronomy 27:19b. *And [then] all the people shall say, 'Amen!'* (NKJ)

Now what does He mean there? Well, after crossing Jordan, Israel came to a valley and there was a mountain slope on each side. And six of the tribes went on one side; six of the tribes went on the other side. And Moses in this chapter has the Levites down in the valley and they will make a statement. And this is one of the statements they make.

Deuteronomy 27:19. *'Cursed is the one who perverts the justice due the stranger, the fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'* (NKJ)

And they would do that. And then you read later on in the chapter, one side would pronounce a curse and the people would say "Amen." The other side would pronounce a blessing and the people would say "Amen."

And God made it very clear to the people lining this valley, like an amphitheater, they had to repeat those words. And when they said, "Amen", they meant "So be it." We understand. We're going to obey this.

And so, God, once again, brought widows into that mix because of his concern and his love for them. Look at Isaiah chapter 10. We're going to read the first three verses and then verses 5 and 6. Our Congress would do well to read this! Isaiah 10 verse 1:

Isaiah 10:1. *Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed; 2) To turn aside the needy*

from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows [might] be their prey, and that they [might] rob the fatherless! 3) And what will [you] do in the day of visitation, (KJV)

There's going to be a day of accounting. There's going to be a day of reckoning. And he says:

Isaiah 10:3. *And what will [you] do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation which shall come from far? to whom will [you] flee for help? (KJV)*

"The widows are looking to you for help. You're not helping them. And I'm going to curse you and you're going to have to answer for it. And when I do, who are you going to look to for help?" when the great God comes after you.

He says:

Isaiah 10:3b. *to whom will [you] flee for help? and where will [you] leave your glory? (KJV)*

Now I'll just give you an example here of several years ago. We had a widow who when her husband was alive, they went to one of these certified financial planners and got their house in order and had a very comfortable retirement fund for both of them. Her husband had a stroke and died. And then once he died, this unscrupulous financial advisor came in while she was grieving, had her sign some papers that she didn't read. She trusted in him. And he took every penny she had except for the house was paid for and a several year old car. Other than that she saw nothing!

Here this man did this—I got involved after the fact and was shocked to find out that this happened. And the family trusted this guy, but when he could not provide a monthly report of where the money was and where it was being used, all of a sudden red flags came up. And then the police were called in and ultimately the FBI was called in. And, as a result, this man spent several years in jail. He lost his wife; he lost his family; he lost his ability to work in that field forever. And frankly, that isn't enough! And this world's justice doesn't do enough, but at least that man, at least in this life, started paying some of the penalty. Now he'll have his chance later on.

And God provides for this widow to this day. She doesn't live extravagantly, but she had a comfortable living as a widow.

But the fact is that the only conclusion you can draw from reading these Old Testament Scriptures is "Don't mess with a widow!" And we need to all take that into account and into consideration. You don't mess around with a widow. You want a curse, you want to have problems in your life, you don't want to be blessed? Then start messing around with God's widows because He's going to get involved and He's going to take care of them.

Now, what about the New Testament? What does the New Testament say? Did Christ say anything about widows?

Well, one of the very first examples is Christ praised a widow because He noted that she gave more than anybody else. I think you know the account. Let's go to Mark chapter 12. If Christ didn't love the widow, He would not pay attention to them. But He noticed right off a widow walking up to the place where they dropped in their money, this big metal bowl that rang and the more money you threw in the bottom of it, the more it would ring. And He noticed some important things. We're going to read verses 41 through 44.

Mark 12:41. *And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. (KJV)*

You could hear the clanging and the banging and it was self-serving in that regard.

But notice verse 42:

Mark 12:42. *And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, (KJV)*

Two mites today would be one-quarter of one penny. Now that's not much. It says:

Mark 12:42b. *[and it makes] a farthing. (KJV)*

Verse 43:

Mark 12:43. *And he called unto him his disciples, (KJV)*

Because He took note of the widow!

Mark 12:43b. *and [He said] unto them, [Truly] I say unto you, That this poor widow [has] cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: 44) For all they did cast [out] of their abundance; (KJV)*

After all the blessings and the abundance that they have, but He said:

Mark 12:44b. *she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living. (KJV)*

And so what He is saying is that widows should not feel like second-class Christians because they cannot give much. Even if they give a few cents or a few dollars, Christ said, "She cast in more, as a percentage of what she had, than all the rest of them combined!" God knows and God understands.

So this verse tells us a lot of things. It tells us Christ takes note of the widow. He understands what their plight is. He understands what their economic situation

is. He understands what they're giving. He understands their heart. And because of all that, He understands our widows today and He understands your plight and your situation. But please understand as Christ understands that because you can't give much, that doesn't mean anything! All it means is you're giving of what little you have and Christ understands that and accounts for it accordingly. Christ knew back then and He knows today, He knows today of the widows' plight and that the widows' desire to give. So don't feel like a second-class Christian if you can't throw a pile of money into the pot or we put say our Holy Day Offerings back in the box at the back of the room. Don't feel like a second-class Christian because you put in relatively speaking a little bit. Christ understands.

Now let's also understand that widows in the New Testament Church were considered by God to be afflicted. Let's go to James chapter 1 and read the very famous Scripture verse 27. James 1 and verse 27, James is getting across, he's telling us "You want to know what pure religion is?" He says, "I'm going to tell you what pure religion is." James 1 verse 27, he said:

James 1:27. Pure religion and undefiled (KJV)

Meaning: pure and clean!

James 1:27b. before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and [the] widows in their affliction, (KJV)

The New International says, "widows in their distress."

The New King James says, "widows in their trouble."

Because Christ and the Father and the apostles knew back then and we know today that being a widow is afflicting, is troublesome, can lead to great distress. Because widows, most often, can't go out and earn a living. They have to rely on family. They have to rely on the government. They have to rely on the Church. And so, in many cases because of ill health, because of other circumstances, daily circumstances to them, daily chores to them are troublesome sometimes, distressing sometimes. We need to realize this and we need to act according.

If we visit the widows in their affliction, we will know what their afflictions are. We will be able, therefore, to help them and encourage them.

Because God was so concerned about the widows, he created an office just to look after them! Now this says a lot about God. He created an office to look out for the widows. Let's go to Acts chapter 6. This is the account of the creation of the office of a deacon. Acts 6, we'll read the first three verses. It says:

Acts 6:1. And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, (KJV)

And we all understand that in the early days in the Church, it was growing exponentially. Thousands sometimes were called at one time!

Acts 6:1b. *the number ... was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians (KJV)*

Now what that means is it's not talking about the Greeks. It's talking about the Hellenists. And the Hellenists were Jews who adopted Greek culture and Greek language. So in Judah at that time and certainly in Jerusalem, the Jews were divided into two camps. Because you understand that the Greek culture spread through all the Middle East. The Romans conquered the Greeks. Jerusalem was conquered by the Romans. All of Judah was. And as a result, many Jews began to adopt Greek and Roman culture and to speak their language and to dress that way and to furnish their houses that way. And so they were in their lifestyle mimicked the Romans and the Greeks before them. Then there were other Jews that held to the traditions of the fathers.

And there were sometimes trouble between those two groups. The fact is that God called people out of both groups. So they come into the Church and now all of a sudden, the Jews and the Hellenists are rubbing elbows and there's some friction. And so the complaint was:

Acts 6:1 continued. *[there was murmuring of the Hellenists] against the Hebrews, because their widows [meaning the Hellenists' widows] were neglected in the daily ministrations. (KJV)*

Meaning: passing out of food, passing out of clothing, looking after them. Verse 2:

Acts 6:2. *Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, [This isn't a] reason that we should leave the [work] of God, and serve tables. (KJV)*

Meaning: to pass out the food and to sort the clothes and all of that. Verse 3, we're told, "'Wherefore,' because of this, we can't devote ourselves to that but the need is there. There is a need to take care of the widows."

Acts 6:3. *Wherefore, brethren, look out [from] among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy [Spirit] and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. (KJV)*

Or: to do this job, or to fulfill this responsibility toward the widows. And so, a whole office was created to take care of the widows. Does that sound like God doesn't care about the widows? Or Christ isn't concerned about the widows? Well, of course not!

There are—I counted just very briefly—fourteen different Scriptures in the Bible that are severe warnings about not oppressing widows. God is very concerned about this. I mean does this all sound like God doesn't recognize or care for the widows? Well, obviously not!

1. So, how does God view widows?

Summing up the First Point:

God hears widows. He has said that. God provides for widows. He has promised that. God says He will punish Israel for ignoring or taking advantage of widows. And part of the punishment we see on this country and other countries today, Israelite countries today, are a result of their attitudes toward the elderly and the widows. Christ praised a widow who gave more than all the others. And He took note of that! A widow is considered by God to be in affliction or to be in trouble and He created an office to look after them for that very reason.

So Point Number One:

I. God views the widows in a very special way. And He has elevated their care to the highest of levels.

Now, let's go to the Second Point. This applies to all of us.

II. What is our responsibility toward widows in the Church? Has God just not said much about it? Or is God very specific about our responsibility toward widows in the Church?

If you look at all the Scriptures, it's easy. They fall into three different categories of all the admonitions, if you go through them and study them about our responsibilities—three categories of responsibilities.

The first—if you like to outline—it would be Point A, is that:

A. We must pray daily for them, for the widows.

Let's go to Matthew chapter 6 and look at the outline for the prayer, the outline that Christ gave about how we should pray every day. Now while it specifically doesn't mention widows, it obviously refers to them by implication. Matthew 6, we're going to read verses 9 through 13. It says—Christ says:

Matthew 6:9. *After this manner therefore pray [you]: Our Father which [is] in heaven, Hallowed be [Your] name. 10) [Your] kingdom come. [Your] will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. (KJV)*

So the prayer starts off in verse 9 by exalting God. And it's always good when you kneel down to pray to exalt God first because it sets the stage of who He is versus who we are. And it establishes the difference and allows us to pray with humility.

And in verse 10, the first thing we should pray for is that God's will is done and not ours. I've said that before. We pray for that in the Church, in the Pacific Church of God. We pray for that in our lives that we don't do our will, our notions. We want to do God's will and we have to keep our mind open to what God's will is and that's how we start the prayer. We want God to reveal to us what His will is for the things that we pray about.

Verse 11, notice this. He's saying to people, individuals, on how they should pray, but He says:

Matthew 6:11. Give us this day our daily bread. (KJV)

Now why would He do that? "Give us this day." If it was about an individual, you would say, "Give me this day my daily bread." But Christ didn't say that. He said, "Give us this day our daily bread." That means that we have to pray for others who need daily bread. Now who else would need it more than a widow? So this tells us our prayers have to be about other people in addition to ourselves.

Verse 12:

Matthew 6:12. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. (KJV)

Again, praying for other people! People who have sinned against us, people we have sinned against, people who might oppress a widow, or, hopefully, someone that maybe a widow sinned against.

Verse 13:

Matthew 6:13. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from [the] evil [one]: (KJV)

We need to pray for others! And who would take advantage of a widow more than anyone but Satan? We know Satan in 1 Peter chapter 5—we won't go there, but—we're told that Satan our Adversary is a roaring lion. Now who does a lion go after? Goes after the stragglers. Goes after the weak. He doesn't go into the middle of a gaggle of deer. He gets the ones who are weak and are straggling—the easy prey. The weak among God's people, physically certainly, are certainly are widows. And we need to understand that and we need to pray for the widows that God would deliver them from the evil one, just as we pray for ourselves, and would deliver them from temptation or trial or test, just as we pray for ourselves.

And He goes on to say:

Matthew 6:13b. For [Yours] is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. (KJV)

"Us" means all of God's children, but particularly the afflicted. Wouldn't God want us to pray first for those who are in trouble or those who are afflicted? And He says throughout Scripture that the widows are considered to be afflicted. So we should pray for them as much, if not more, than any other category because of their affliction.

So the first thing we must do is pray daily for our widows.

Point B, the second we should do is:

B. We are commanded to fellowship with them.

We just read it in James chapter 1 verse 27. "Visit the widows and the fatherless in their affliction." Now the reason that's important is that widows tend to gather together. If there's more than one widow in a Church area, they will often fellowship together, but widows need fellowship from people who are not widows. Widows need to be around young kids. Widows need to hold little babies. Widows need to talk to teenagers. Widows need to talk to young married couples. Widows need to talk to older couples, older individuals. They need contact with Brethren who are not like themselves. It opens their horizons and, as we're going to see in a little bit that it blesses us, because we can learn from widows. It's very important.

Look at Job chapter 32 verse 7. A true saying! This relates directly about learning from older people, more experienced people. Job 32 and verse 7, this is a true saying.

Job 32:7. I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom. (KJV)

People who have been around a long time, especially widows who have lost their mates, widows today many of them lived through World War II, lived through the depression. They have stories to tell that most of us have never experienced. And we can learn a lot from widows. Andy Rooney, the commentator on "Sixty Minutes", said "The best classroom in the world is at the feet of an elderly person." The best classroom in the world is at the feet of an elderly person because of their experience and their knowledge. And it is amazing! You talk to a widow what you find out, what you learn, the experiences that she has had! We can learn from their life's experiences.

Now I can't tell you the number of times I've gone to visit a widow with the object of cheering her up and encouraging her and 95% of the time, you're the one that gets cheered up. You're the one that gets encouraged and you come out bouncing away from the time with the widow feeling much more elevated, much more uplifted, much happier because you spent time with a widow. I gained more from the visit than they did! Happens all the time because they have so much to give and there is so much to learn from our widows. And you can do it on the Sabbath. You can do it at your place, or you can do it at their place, or you can do it over the telephone, but the point is that we have to fellowship with widows. It is very, very important. Do not leave them alone! Please don't leave them alone.

And the third, Point C is:

C. We have to help provide for their needs.

Yes, third tithe can help. Yes, the Church can help, but it's on our backs too. Our responsibilities too to provide for whatever their needs might be. Let's go to

Isaiah chapter 1 and verse 16. God is condemning Judah here because they did not do that. Isaiah chapter 1 verse 16, this principle is about Judah but it still holds today. Isaiah 1 verse 16, it says:

Isaiah 1:16. *Wash you, make you clean [Because they weren't clean!]; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; (KJV)*

In verse 16, he's saying, "Okay I want you to stop doing evil." But in verse 17, "I want you to go the other direction."

Isaiah 1:17. *Learn to do well; [to] seek judgment [or justice], relieve the oppressed, [provide justice for] the fatherless, [and] plead for the widow. (KJV)*

Now this is addressed to the average Jew, but by principle it's addressed to the average Church member today.

The Hebrew word for "plead" is an interesting word. It literally means "to toss, to throw something." And it would be used in a wrestling match. If you threw somebody to the ground in a wrestling match you would use this Hebrew word. It can mean "to grapple", or by implication, it means "to defend."

And it says, "You need to plead for the widow." That means you need to go to battle for the widow. You need to fight for the widow. You need to struggle and grapple and wrestle for the widow. And, obviously, Judah did not do that and God was condemning them for that.

Now let's go to 1 John chapter 3 and see a principle that applies to everyone but when we understand that widows are afflicted or in trouble, it should apply even more to them. 1 John chapter 3 verses 16 through 18, we're told:

1 John 3:16. *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: (KJV)*

Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.

Middle of verse 16:

1 John 3:16b. *we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (KJV)*

That is a principle. Verse 17:

1 John 3:17. *But whoso [has] this world's good, and [sees] his brother (KJV)*

Or we could say, "his sister, the widow".

1 John 3:17b. *have need, (KJV)*

And who has more need than a widow as we've already established.

I John 3:17 continued. and [shuts] up his bowels of compassion from him, (KJV)

John asks the question: How dwells the love of God in a person like that who looks on the needs of a widow and then just walks by? Doesn't provide. How does the love of God reside in a person like that?

He goes on to say in verse 18:

I John 3:18. My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. (KJV)

In what we do! So don't just call up a widow, find out she needs something, and then say, "Have a nice day," and hang up the phone. We have to go provide for the needs of that widow. We demonstrate the love of God in us by how we take care of the widows. I'll say it again: We demonstrate the love of God in us by how we take care of the widows and those who are in need!

So our job is to provide for the widows. We have a responsibility to pray for them, to visit them, and to help provide for them. All of us as individuals!

Now let's go to the Third Question that we were going to ask and answer today. And that is directed towards the widows.

III. What are the widows' responsibilities toward others in the Church?

Based on everything we read should the widows just be a sponge and kind of lay back and receive the service of others with nothing to do themselves, with no responsibilities? That's not what the Bible says. Yet, and conversely though, some widows feel that because they receive service that they're a burden on the Church and that they can't serve. And God says, "No, you need to serve and there are certain ways you can serve." So that's what we're going to talk about now, what are the duties of a widow, what does God want a widow to be doing.

Again, we have three that we're going to talk about, three areas.

The first, Point A is that:

A. You have to trust in God for everything. Trust in God for all your needs.

Because widows learn very quickly that their only unwavering hope is in God because they have to trust in God for everything. Look at Jeremiah 49 and verse 11. This is an admonishment to the widows to trust in God. Jeremiah 49 and verse 11, we're going to focus on the last part of the verse where it says:

Jeremiah 49:11. Leave [your] fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; (KJV)

But notice the last part of Jeremiah 49 verse 11, it says:

Jeremiah 49:11b. and let [your] widows trust in me. (KJV)

Let's understand that the bottom line when the rubber meets the road, the widows must trust in God because He is the only one ultimately that will take care of him. We trust in God more than any human being and widows need to trust in God more than anyone.

I remember talking to a widow. She died a couple of years ago. And we were talking in her living room one time and she said—we were talking about getting groceries and how she gets her groceries and all. And she says, "You know I worry about things that I never used to worry about." She was in her eighties and she could still drive. She was very careful when she drove but she could still drive. And I said, "Well, can you get your groceries okay?" And she says, "Well, I always go on Wednesday, but I start worrying about the weather several days before. And I worry especially if it's in wintertime. You know can I get out? Are the roads going to be slick? Or is it going to snow the night before? Or is it going to be windy?" She says, "I worry and I stew and sometimes I don't even sleep the night because I'm worried about the weather going out and doing my shopping. And then I worry about falling if it's in the wintertime. And I worry about parking the car and is it going to get hit? Or is it going to get stolen? And then I worry is my house going to be okay when I come home?"

You know when we were young; you never used to worry about that. But as we get older, people generally tend to worry about things that they didn't worry about before in part because they've had so much experience. They know that life can blowup in your face and they've seen it before!

But widows who are totally alone worry a lot about that. And the bottom line, we were talking about I said, "God is your only hope. When you're out there in the car and all of a sudden you start skidding on the ice, God is your only hope. You can't have a Church member come and magically appear at that moment in time." And she says, "No, I've learned to trust in God for everything! Everything!"

And so, under Point A, widows learn very early on that for financial needs, for health, for transportation, for getting to Church, all of that, they trust in God. They have to trust in God.

Now the Church can help and should help. Let's go to 1 Timothy chapter 5 and we're going to read the first ten verses because Paul is instructing Timothy about serving the needs of widows.

And the King James calls them "widows indeed". Modern translations say "widows who are really widows" and we'll get into that distinction as we read this. I'm going to read it out of the New King James.

Understand Paul is writing to Timothy who is a young elder and he's dealing with people who are old enough to be his parents and grandparents. And he's giving him some instruction. Verse 1:

1 Timothy 5:1. *Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, (NKJ)*

And then he says:

1 Timothy 5:1b. *[Exhort] younger men as brothers, (NKJ)*

And he says in verse 2:

1 Timothy 5:2. *[By implication, do not rebuke an] older [woman but appeal to her or exhort her as a mother], younger as sisters, with all purity. (NKJ)*

In other words, have a clean mind and a clean heart. You're there to serve them. You're not there to get something from them.

Verse 3, notice what he says.

1 Timothy 5:3. *Honor widows who are really widows. (NKJ)*

The King James says:

1 Timothy 5:3. *Honor widows that are widows indeed. (KJV)*

Now what is he talking about? We're talking about how the Church can help. He says:

1 Timothy 5:4. *But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home [meaning the children and the grandchildren] to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God. (NKJ)*

So, let's understand that the first line of defense in the aid of a widow should come from her very own family—from her children, and, if she's old enough, from her adult grandchildren. That's what he's saying here. So, he says if widows have family, then they're not really widows indeed or really widows as far as the Church is concerned because we're going to see the Church looks at a widow as somebody who is desolate, who has no family.

Verse 5:

1 Timothy 5:5. *Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, (NKJ)*

Meaning she doesn't have family nearby.

1 Timothy 5:5b. *trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. (NKJ)*

Now we're going to note this because it says, "A widow who is alone is forced to trust in God and to get down on her knees and ask God for help night and day."

He says:

1 Timothy 5:6. *But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives. (NKJ)*

Meaning, if the widow is there just to take and take and take, and is looking after only pleasure, he said, "She's already going in the Lake of Fire. It's just a matter of time before she gets there."

Verse 7:

1 Timothy 5:7. *And these things command, that they may be blameless. (NKJ)*

Verse 9:

1 Timothy 5:9. *Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, (NKJ)*

Now what is he talking about? He's talking about the number of widows that the Church supports through third tithe, the number of widows who get aid from the Church. He says, "Don't take somebody into that number who is under sixty." Now we're talking about widows. He says:

1 Timothy 5:9b. *and not unless she has been the wife of one man, 10) well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, (NKJ)*

Meaning: humble, not afraid of menial tasks.

1 Timothy 4:10b. *if she has relieved the afflicted [served others], if she has diligently followed every good work. (NKJ)*

So he says that widows indeed can come into the number if they're above a certain age if they are truly alone and don't have family and if they have a history of doing good works. So the Church then will help. But understand that as we read earlier on here that they're on their knees day and night trusting in God because God is their ultimate hope.

And I'm here to tell you that we have had widows in the Church who have been the objects of theft by their children and by their grandchildren. That is horrible! The children and grandchildren weren't in the Church. The widow was. And the widow calls up and says, "My son did this," or "My grandson did that," or "My

granddaughter did this, took this from me, stole this from me." And it's sad. It is just unbelievable to think that near family would do that! It's amazing!

But what I'm saying here in Point A that widows learn to trust God with everything, for everything. And they become much closer to God because their daily needs are provided by Him.

So, the first responsibility that a widow has is to trust in God. That means being close to God, praying, studying, fasting, being close to God.

The second one, Point B is:

B. Widows have an obligation by God to teach by their example.

To teach by their example! We just read it in verse 10. "Reported to do good works, brought up children, lodged strangers, washed saints' feet, relieved the afflicted, diligently followed every good work." Widows have a responsibility to set an example.

Now let's go to Titus chapter 2 and we're going to read verses 3 through 5. Paul is giving Titus some advice on widows and older women. Titus 2 verses 3 through 5, he's talking about older women. Notice in verse 3:

Titus 2:3. *The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as [becomes] holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; 4) That they may teach the young women to be sober, (KJV)*

Now that's not teaching the women not to drink. The word "sober" means to be sound-minded. In other words, don't be flighty; don't be frivolous. Be mature; be sound-minded.

Titus 2:4b. *to love their husbands, to love their children, 5) To be discreet, chaste [not lewd], keepers at home, (KJV)*

Not flitting around to the mall doing this and that; ignoring your family, ignoring your home.

Titus 2:5b. *good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. (KJV)*

So widows by their example should be teaching that to others. And it's not wrong for a widow to come up to a younger woman and put her arm around her and give some advice. It's not wrong for that at all. But what it does, you see, is it gets the widows' mind off themselves and their affliction and onto others how they might help.

Because I'm telling you if a widow—and I've seen this happen, not often—but if a widow gets her mind on herself and is home alone and is not reaching out and serving others, they can become selfish. They can become spoiled. They can

become gossips. They can become judgmental and critical of others. And the net result is the widow is miserable! And that's what happens to any of us when we turn inward. And particularly with widows, since they're alone, there is a danger of just focusing on yourself and your problems and God is telling us, "Get your mind off yourself and serve other people. Teach by your example."

That was Point B.

Point C is:

C. You need to dedicate yourself to spiritual service.

A widow needs to dedicate herself to spiritual service. And you could say, "Well, how can I spiritually serve? I can't be a minister. I don't have the health to go out and do all this other stuff." Well, the one thing widows have is time. Widows have a lot of time.

Let's go to 1 Corinthians 7 and verse 34. Notice a principle here. 1 Corinthians 7 and verse 34, Paul is saying:

1 Corinthians 7:34. *There is a difference also between a wife and a virgin [one who has not been married]. [He says,] The unmarried woman [cares] for the things of the [Eternal], (KJV)*

Now a widow is an unmarried woman.

1 Corinthians 7:34b. *The unmarried [cares] for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: (KJV)*

Because she has the time and she doesn't have a husband.

1 Corinthians 7:34 continued. *but she that is married [cares] for the things of the world, how she may please her husband. (KJV)*

So, widows, by definition, have the time and the focus to care for the things of God and to be holy in both body and in spirit.

Now let's jump to Luke chapter 2 and look at the example of a prophetess whose name was Anna. We're going to read verses 36 and 37 of Luke chapter 2. How would you like to be a widow and have your name written in Scripture to be there for an eternity? This woman did because of who she was and what she did. Luke 2 verse 36:

Luke 2:36. *And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of [Asher]: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; (KJV)*

Typically they married in their late teens. And so she married somewhere sixteen to twenty—nineteen in there. And then she lived with this husband for seven years. Verse 37:

Luke 2:37. *And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, (KJV)*

She'd been a widow for eighty-four years! Now you add eighty-four to the sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, plus the seven she was married to here husband. She was well over a hundred years old! But notice he said:

Luke 2:37. *And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. (KJV)*

She was at least a hundred and three! And she went to the Temple and she fasted and she prayed.

And so the spiritual service widows can render is this: All widows have the time to pray. Lots of time to pray! Widows should get in more prayer than just about anybody. Widows have the time to fast. Widows should fast often to stay close to God and to beseech God. Widows, because they don't have a mate, now have this time and they can spend the time in fasting and in prayer. And if they're eyes are good enough and their mental focus is good enough, obviously in study.

Many women—as some of us do even now—say, "I read a Scripture and five minutes later I can't remember what I read." And that's common to a lot of us. And that means that there's an extra burden to make sure that you focus your mind when you study. We talked to a widow last week and we're getting her one of those giant Bibles with huge print because she just can't see anymore.

And widows have the time to fast and to pray and to study. That is their spiritual service. They can teach. They can fast. They can pray, but above all, their job is to trust in God for everything they have. That is a widow's responsibility.

So in conclusion—let's wrap it up here—what we've learned is that widows are here and they are a benefit to the Church because of their spiritual service, but because we also have the opportunity to serve them and to obey God in doing so. There are tremendous opportunities for widows.

You set an example of faith. If widows have to trust in God for everything, what an example that is for the rest of us to see a widow trusting in God totally!

And widows can display great wisdom in their conversations with the rest of us—great wisdom, great knowledge—because we can learn a lot by their example and by what they've been through, by their history.

And we can learn from them by how they devote themselves to God and how they serve God and serve the Church in prayer and fasting and concern for the Brethren. We can learn a lot from widows.

So widows, understand you have a great potential for spiritual service.

We are here to learn from the widows, to serve the widows, and to honor the widows. And shame on us if we don't! We need to do that. Taking care of a widow gets to the heart and core of our Christianity. If we can't take care of widows, we can take care of anybody!

And so, certainly in the Pacific Church of God, we need to make it a mission, an absolute mission to take care of the widows in the Church.

We'll close with two Scriptures here. Let's look at a command from God—one more command about taking care of the widows. Let's go to Zechariah chapter 7 and we're going to read verses 8 through 10, a command from God concerning widows. Zechariah 7 verse 8:

Zechariah 7:8. *And the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah, saying, (KJV)*

Okay, this is God speaking directly to Zechariah. Zechariah's writing it down. Verse 9 of Zechariah 7:

Zechariah 7:9. *Thus [speaks] the [Eternal] of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment [or justice], and show mercy and compassions every man to his brother [or sister]: 10) And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother [or sister] in [his] heart. (KJV)*

So we cannot oppress them. In fact, we have to do just the opposite.

Then God says if you ignore the widow, if you don't take care of the widow, there's going to be a severe penalty for you. Look at Malachi chapter 3 and verse 5, one final Scripture. Malachi 3 and verse 5, there is a day of reckoning coming and we don't want to be on the wrong side of the reckoning. Malachi 3 verse 5:

Malachi 3:5. *And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against (KJV)*

Now notice who God's going to be a witness against. Not that He hasn't been before but at the end of days, it could be even worse.

Malachi 3:5b. *[I'm going to be a swift witness against] sorcerers, against the adulterers, against [those who lie] false swearers, against those that oppress the [following groups:] the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and [do not] fear me, (KJV)*

He says those that oppress the widow, He says, "I am going to call you to judgment. You will pay"—nations, peoples, tribes, clans, churches, and individuals.

So the important thing, as we read here, is God places the oppression of widows right up there with breaking the Ten Commandments! He says, "False swearers, adulterers, sorcerers," and so on. Oppressing a widow is right up there with them. We wouldn't think of being a sorcerer, but oppressing a widow is right at that same level in God's mind. So we need to heed.

And it also says how God feels about widows. He's saying, "You oppress one of my ladies, you oppress one of my elderly widows, you start screwing around with them, I look at you as I would a sorcerer. I look at you as I would a murderer or somebody that's just reprobate morally." So we need to take heed about that.

So, what we've seen today, I hope, is a more clear picture of our great God. Because if we examine how God views widows, what does that say about God? It tells us that God really cares for those who are helpless. God really cares for those who are oppressed. God really cares for those who can't help themselves. And He has set up mechanisms and offices and commandments to take care of those.

Well, what does that say about the love of God? It says that God has His mind off of Himself and on others! God cares about His children and He especially cares about the children that are the most vulnerable, that are the weakest, and the most helpless as we've seen—fatherless children, infants, but especially the widow!

So what does it teach us about God? A lot about God's love for His Family and His children! And so, what we need to do is be thankful that we have a God that loves and provides for this special, special group of people in the Church—our widows!