

"Widows Indeed."

1 Tim. 5.

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The widow is often seen in Scripture as the object of the thoughts of God. But it is not until we come to the epistle to Timothy that we have the different kinds specified, with the indication of those who are widows according to the divine mind, those, in a word, who are really widows. Such the apostle directs Timothy, and us through Timothy, to honour, showing by the exhortation the place which they should ever occupy among the saints of God.

Three characteristics are given of the "widow indeed." She is "desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day." (v. 5.) A true widow, then, before God will exemplify these characters; and it is not a little remarkable that three widows are found in the gospel of Luke who exactly answer to the particulars of this description. The widow of Nain, whose son, "the only son of his mother," was being carried out for burial when met by our blessed Lord, as the Prince of Life, was truly the desolate one. (Luke 7.) The poor widow who cast in her two mites into the treasury, who "of her penury cast in all her living," was surely one who trusted in God. (Luke 21.) And in Anna we find the last characteristic; for it is said of her that "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." (Luke 2: 37.) It is possible that each of these widows might have been a "widow indeed" — Anna certainly was — but in the way in which they are presented by the evangelist, it is the three together that answer to this character.

Spiritually, nothing could be more beautiful than the widow as so portrayed, though naturally the heart would shrink from it. But it must be remembered that the desolation, which is her essential feature, is only on the side of earth; nay, it might be added with perfect truth, that her very bereft condition has been the means, in the dealings of the God of all comfort, of her choicest blessing. It is precisely here where the application to the Church may be seen. It is when the Church realizes her widowhood, as far as earth is concerned, and in this aspect her desolation, as being without a single visible resource, that she enters most fully upon the enjoyment of the boundless affections of her Lord; and not only so, but thereby her entire dependence on Him would be consciously intensified, and out of this again would grow her continual supplications and prayers night and day. In the "widow indeed" we have a perfect picture (ideal because perfect) of the Church on earth. The characteristics given are moreover seen in our blessed Lord Himself. He was alone, had not where to lay His head, and none on earth had fellowship with Him; He trusted in God, and He was constantly occupied in prayer. (Luke 5: 12, 16, etc.) Every believer therefore should be thus distinguished, and will be in proportion as he is like his Lord.

The apostle having portrayed the true widow, supplies the contrast in the one "that liveth in pleasure," who "is dead while she liveth." Such an one is false to her character, denying that she

is a widow, and using her lonely condition as an opportunity to gratify her inclinations and worldly desires, instead of hearing the voice of Him who speaks to her through her sorrows, as to Israel of old, "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably to her." (Hosea 2: 13.) So living she is dead — dead toward God, in she midst of her pleasures. We have the counterpart of such a widow in the Apocalypse, together with the certainty of her coming doom. "How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, *I sit a queen, and am no widow*, and shall see no sorrow. Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her." (Rev. 18: 7, 8.) Such is the doom of Babylon, which, while claiming to be the spouse of Christ, was nothing but an apostate harlot, who "was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornications." (Rev. 17: 4.)

Further, the apostle gives directions as to the action of the assembly in relation to widows. It is very noteworthy that the first difficulty in the Church sprung up in connection with such. (See Acts 6: 1.) It shows that they were a numerous class even in the Pentecostal Church; and it would seem, from the instruction given to Timothy, that a large number will always be found in fellowship with the saints of God. This is a blessed thought; revealing the beauty of God's ways, even as one of old has said, "God often dims the brightness of this world, in order to attract the vision to the glory beyond." If therefore He makes a widow, it is that He might wean her from earth, and win her to Himself. But the point here is, that the widow in her needs might be an embarrassment to the Church. Hence the apostle commands that none should "be taken into the number under threescore years old," etc. (vv. 9, 10.) By this we understand, that only those who answer to the description here given were to be formally linked with the assembly; i.e. recognized as entitled to regular support. Others might of course be ministered to privately by the saints, or occasionally by the Church, but none but these were to be put down in the list of those who had undeniable claims upon the funds of the assembly. It would have saved the Church much perplexity if the wisdom of God, as here expressed, had governed in this particular. It will also be observed that age, in and by itself, does not give the needful qualification. She must not have been twice married, and she must be well reported of, both as to her home duties and as to her activities in the Lord's service. The character of her good works — works which are therefore according to the mind of God — might well be commended for consideration to many in a day like this of incessant and ever-increasing activity.

The younger widows are to be refused; i.e. we judge, not to "be taken into the number." The reason is given. "For when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ; they will marry: having damnation [or being guilty] because they have cast off their first faith." Their "first faith" would probably mean that in the time of their bereavement, when the Lord drew them through their grief near to Himself, they devoted themselves entirely to Him and His service. But, losing heart for Christ, "they will" — or rather, they wish to — "marry," finding themselves unable in such a state of soul to lean for all the support they need on Christ; and thus they turn with longing desire to the succour of human affections and a human arm. An unsatisfied heart is the source of much sin, as the next verse most surely reveals. "And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also, and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not," fruitful source of unhappiness and sorrow in the Church

of God in every age and in every clime. The antidote is supplied. "I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully." (v. 14.) The term "younger women" is perhaps general, though with special reference to widows. The home is the appointed sphere of service for all such, if they would be in subjection to the Lord, and in comparative shelter from the snares of Satan. One other word is given to define the responsibilities of believers towards the widows of their own families, and this in order that the Church may be free to "relieve them that are widows indeed."

We may, then, gather from the consideration of this scripture some useful lessons. First we learn, as already expressed, what a heart God has for those who are truly widows. Evidences of this are found both in the Old and New Testament Scriptures. It follows therefore, secondly, that if we would be in fellowship with Him, they should ever be the objects of our loving care and ministry. Lastly, we may gather from these directions to Timothy what an important sphere of service a "widow indeed" occupies before God. Anna is an example of this among the little remnant that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. In her continual fastings and prayers she had been brought into communion with the mind of God, while waiting for the advent of the Messiah. She was therefore led into the temple at the moment when the infant Jesus was being presented to Jehovah, and her heart was filled with joy, and her lips with praise; and she went forth as the messenger of the glad tidings of the Christ to those who had with her looked and longed for this blessed time. Where, then, are the "widows indeed" of the present day? Morally we occupy the same position as that of the little band in Jerusalem. Like them, we are expecting our Lord; meanwhile God calls those who are truly widows to be occupied with fasting and prayers, that thereby they may bear up the whole Church with their intercessions, and thus be the means of kindling anew in many hearts the blessed hope of the Lord's return. There are many to serve in labours of love, but there is even a greater need for the service of those who, like Epaphras, know how to labour fervently for the saints in prayers. It is this service to which the "widows indeed" are called, and for which they have been divinely qualified. May the Church increasingly reap the fruit of their blessed service in this dark and evil day! E. D.