

Care for Widows and Elderly

by Mr. Roy Holladay

I want to give a sermon today that ties in, in one sense, with Mother's Day. We know that Mother's Day is the day that honors our mothers. The sermon is going to be dealing with honor, respect that we should be showing; and as I get into the sermon, you'll see what I mean.

You find that God indicts both ancient and modern Israel in the prophecies of the Bible for their national sins, or for our ins. Many sins are listed, the major ones being idolatry, Sabbath breaking, crimes against humanity; and yet, there is one category of sin that God repeats over and over in the scriptures, that whenever you see that God gives a list and He begins to talk about some of the sins of Israel, these are mentioned. It's one reason, as we will see, for a coming national captivity.

I want us to begin today by taking a look at those prophecies to see exactly what God says and what we can learn from it. Let's turn back to the book of **Zechariah** in our Bibles, **chapter 7**, and we will begin in **verse 8**. It says:

Zech. 7:8-10 – *Then the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, saying, "Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Execute true justice, show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother.'..."*

So God talks here about the defenseless, the weak, the poor, the elderly, the widow; and He indicts our people. He says, "Do not in any way oppress them."

In **verses 11-14**, notice what God says: *"But they refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, and stopped their ears so that they could not hear. Yes, they made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law and the words which the Lord of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets. Thus great wrath came from the Lord of hosts. Therefore it happened, that just as He proclaimed and they would not hear, so they called out and I would not listen," says the Lord of hosts. "But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations which they had not known. Thus the land became desolate after them, so that no one passed through or returned; for they made the pleasant land desolate."*

So God says, "OK, you would not listen to My prophets, My servants, when they clearly articulated to you what the needs were, so when the time of captivity comes, I will turn My ear from listening to you." That basically summarizes what it says here.

Let's go back to **Jeremiah, chapter 7**, and we'll begin to read here, pick up the story in **verse 3**. Because God is always concerned for His people, God is not wanting to take His people into captivity; but He sends His prophets. Whether we recognize it or not, today, brethren, we stand in that position. We have the responsibility of going to the nations, especially the nations of Israel, to proclaim to them what God says and to ask people to change, to repent, to alter their way. Beginning here in verse 3:

Jer. 7:3-7 – *Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: "Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Do not trust in these lying words, saying, 'The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these.'" We could say today, "Well, we're God's church, we're God's church, we're God's church." You know, we are the temple of God today. But notice He says, "For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt, then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever."*

So God says, "Look...," if we are willing to amend our ways, trust in Him, and look after those who are needy, then He will allow us to stay in the land. The problem is, down through the ages you find that the peoples of Israel have very seldom heeded the prophets who came to them.

Let's go back to **chapter 1** of the book of **Isaiah**, beginning in **verse 16**, and I want you to notice here, God says:

Isa. 1:16-17 – *"Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow..."*

So, again, you find that God says that we need to look after those who are in a situation where they can't take care of themselves. God talks about those who have need, who do not have the clout to resist the oppressor or those who have power, those who have authority; and so often we find that they are taken advantage of.

Verses 18-20, God tells our people to repent and He says that though our sins are like scarlet, they can be forgiven.

Now notice in **verses 21-23**: *How the faithful city has become a harlot! It was full of justice; righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers. Your silver has become dross, your wine mixed with water. Your princes are rebellious and companions of thieves; everyone loves bribes and follows after rewards. They do not defend the fatherless, nor does the cause of the widow come before them.*

So you can see where God, over and over, indicts our people for neglecting the widow, neglecting the fatherless.

Chapter 10. We'll just read one more scripture. There are a number of scriptures that could be read, but so that you get the idea of what we're talking about...beginning in **verse 1, Isaiah, chapter 10**, and verse 1. It says:

Isa. 10:1-3 – *"Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees, who write misfortune, which they have prescribed to rob the needy of justice, and to take what is right from the poor of My people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless. What will you do in the day of punishment, and in the desolation which will come from afar? To whom will you flee for help? And where will you leave your glory?"* God asks.

You know, brethren, it's very easy to overlook the elderly and the widows and the widower in our society, and quite often it is done. We find today that there are many con artists who take advantage all the time. We read {*about it*} in the paper, you know, it just seems like it's a regular occurrence. You'll read about some con artist coming along and bilking the elderly out of their life savings, or coming along telling them they need a new roof and they charge an inordinate amount of money. People who are living on fixed incomes who slaved all of their life to be able to have a little when they settle down, and then they're taken advantage of.

Also, we find in our society today that too many families neglect their elderly parents, neglect their fathers or their mothers and especially when they might become a widow. And too often there seems to almost be a total disrespect among many of the young people for the elderly. These things are not as they ought to be. This is not the way that God wants society to function.

Have you ever stopped to ask yourself why, over the years, has God called so many elderly into His church? As time progresses, you know, we are an older church. Not just the ministry is getting older, but all of us are getting older. Just out of curiosity, how many of us here are over 50? Would you raise your hands? OK, I won't keep going higher. I was thinking about 55, 60, and we would keep going up. We won't do that. Actually, we have, proportionately, a fairly young church. I mean, there are a lot of young couples here, ABC students. You know, there are young people like my wife and myself...you laugh? But a lot of the congregations that we have pastored, a large percentage of us are getting older.

Since God has called a number of elderly people and a number of us are getting older, the question might be asked, what can the elderly do? What does God expect of the elderly? What is God's purpose for them? And, today, also, we want to ask the question, what can we do to help them? We want to see their important function in the church, and what should be our attitude toward the elderly, toward the widow, toward those who are needy, toward those who might be orphans. Now, God makes it very clear in His law what His

attitude is; and if God has a certain approach, a certain perspective, I would say we ought to try to emulate it. We ought to try to be like He is.

Let's go back to the book of **Exodus, chapter 22, verse 22**. Make it easy for us to remember: 2222. And I want you to notice here, God says:

Ex. 22:22-23 – *"You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If you afflict them in any way, and they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry..."*

Now, that's a fearsome thing to think about. When the widow cries to God, God hears and God will answer. Let me ask the question: Do you want the widows praying FOR you, or against you? {*Laughter*} Over the years, I have found it to my advantage to have the widows praying FOR me; and realizing that they have a great deal of clout with God, I've realized over the years that if you neglect the widows in your congregation, you're in trouble! And so, if you want them praying FOR you, you need to do what you can to help them. God hears their prayers. He hears them when they cry out, and we need to recognize that.

Now, notice in **Deuteronomy, chapter 10, and verse 16**, again, in the law, God reveals His approach, His attitude. We'll begin to read here in verse 16 of Deuteronomy 10:

Deut. 10:16-19 – *Therefore circumcise the of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer. So you find even in the Old Testament God talks about spiritual circumcision. For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of Lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.*

So God has special concern for the fatherless and the widows. Now, not all widows are elderly. We have to understand that, too. Sometimes a woman can be a widow at a very early age. Sometimes a man can be a widower at a very early age. But, brethren, let me state a principle that I think is shown throughout the scriptures. God has great love and admiration for those who help the elderly and serve them, for those who see people who are needy and go out of their way to help them. Would it not be nice to have a reputation of "one who loves the elderly"? Would you not like to be known by that? If there were a sign going around over your head...people would see you and they say, "There goes a person who loves the elderly," or that your family would be noted by that. You know, the family Von Trapp, or whatever your name might be, that that family would be known for loving and being concerned for those who are in need.

Let's notice also in **chapter 24, verse 17**, God clearly explains a principle here not to take advantage of them.

Deut. 24:17 – *You shall not pervert justice due the stranger or the fatherless, nor take a widow's garment as a pledge.*

In ancient Israel, if you owed a debt, you could come in and take something and hold it as a pledge. If the only thing a person had was the garment on his back, God said you could take that garment, but you had to return it to him at night, so he would have something to sleep in, to cover himself up and keep warm. But here it says you're not to take a widow's garment as a pledge. God says don't do that. Don't take advantage of her.

In **Psalm 146** and **verse 9**, let's notice here. I think it's good to go back and review these scriptures. I'm not going to cover anything today that you don't know or that I don't know, that we haven't read many times; but sometimes, brethren, we need to be exhorted and encouraged to do what God says, and sometimes, "out of sight, out of mind." We forget.

Ps. 146:9 – Here you find, *The Lord watches over the strangers; He relieves the fatherless and widow; but the way of the wicked He turns upside down.*

When it says God relieves the fatherless and the widows, this means that God comes to their aid. God comes to assist them. That's what the word means, "to aid," or "to assist." And this is God's approach. Is it our attitude? Do we, when we see, especially those who are of the household of God, the family of God, we look around us and among us, do we look at others and see, well, here's somebody, and help them in their hour of need?

Now, you know, this begs a question, and that is, do we know the elderly and the needy among us? How can you help them if you don't know them? They're not going to come up to you. Most of our widows or our elderly, they're not going to walk up to you and say, "I don't know you, but I have great needs, and let me tell you what my needs are. Can you help me?" How many of you have ever had a widow come up and tell you that? No, they're not going to approach you in that way; but, if they know you and you know them and you have this constant rapport and this contact going back and forth and you see them from week to week, you can pick up on an attitude or approach that there's something wrong, so you begin to talk to them. Then you might be able to help them.

Back up to **chapter 68**. Again, we're looking at what God says, His approach; and we'll begin to read **verse 3**. It says:

Ps. 68:3-5 – *But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God; yes, let them rejoice exceedingly. Sing to God, sing praises to His name; extol Him who rides on the clouds, by His name YAH, and rejoice before Him. A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation.*

So you can have an orphan who doesn't have a father, and God says, "I become their Father," and, in a sense, like a husband to the wife, to look after them, to take care of them. The law reveals God's attitude toward the widow and the elderly in general. You and I should have the same attitude, the same approach, and make sure we think as God thinks.

Why has God, as I asked the question earlier, called so many elderly into His church over the years? You might reason humanly, you know, a human approach, "Well, they're less healthy, can serve less, have less earning power, require more attention. Wouldn't it be more efficient to call the young, those who are at their height of earning money so that they could support the work? Wouldn't that be the logical thing to do?" Obviously, God has other things in mind, doesn't He? God has other things that He is thinking about.

Many elderly people ask the question, "Why did God wait so long to call me? Why didn't He call me when I was younger?" I don't know if you've ever had that question asked you; but as a minister, I've talked to many over the years. I remember one gentleman in particular who was in his seventies. He was still virile, strong in his seventies. His mind was very sharp, and he talked to me about how that even at that age he would have liked to have gone to Ambassador College. He bemoaned the fact, "Why didn't God call me when I was in my twenties or my thirties. I could have gone to Ambassador College and maybe I could have served more." And we talked about it, and we had to come to the conclusion that God knows when it's best to call every one of us. God is going to call each one of us and give us an opportunity for His Kingdom, and He knows when it's best to call us. He knows exactly. And God is the one who is in, we could call, the "calling business." He's the one extending the invitations, and He's the one...well, let's go back and read it. **I Corinthians 12:18**. You and I sometimes might try to second-guess God, wonder why He might do things in a certain way; but God over the decades has called many people in their sixties, seventies, and even up into their eighties to come into His church. In verse 18, notice:

I Cor. 12:18 – *But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.*

So, we look at that and we think, "OK, God has set each one in the body as He pleases," and we think of that from the point of view of giving position, responsibilities, and duties; but also let's realize if God sets us in the body as it pleases Him, then, if He calls us when we're seventy, it pleases Him for us to be there in the body. If He calls us at age fifteen, it pleases Him for us to be a part of the body at that age. God has a purpose for every last one of us. When God calls us to be a part of His body, there is a purpose that He is working out in our lives so that we can be in His Kingdom. As I said, He knows when it's best, or the best time to offer salvation to a person. God would not have a person or call a person if He did not know that that individual could make it into His Kingdom. He calls us because He knows we can make it. We all, no matter what our age, have been called for two major reasons, and this is something that we have talked about over the years. One is to help proclaim the gospel and, secondarily, we are being prepared for rulership in the world tomorrow. Now, there are many other things that you can think of; but those are two major categories.

How do the elderly help preach the gospel? In what way do many of the elderly...what I'm explaining here today is going to apply to a lot of us here shortly. It will apply to me, so I'm preaching to myself here, eight, ten years down the road. You know, you can think,

"Well, I won't be doing what I'm doing presently; and so, therefore, what will I be doing?" Well, let's go over to **Mark 12**, Mark, chapter 12, and we'll begin here in **verse 41**.

Mark 12:41-44 – *Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much. Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury..."* I'm sure that dumbfounded His disciples. You know, how could this be? *"For they all put in out of their abundance..." so out of their abundance.* If you're a millionaire, and you give a hundred thousand, you still have millions in the bank; but if all you've got is 50 cents to your name, and you throw your 50 cents in, you've given everything; and that's the illustration that He's putting forth. *"For they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."*

A principle: God doesn't look at the amount. He looks at the heart. He looks at the attitude. All of us have an opportunity to support the work through our tithes and our offerings. It doesn't matter if it's a nickel, a dime, 50 cents, a dollar, a hundred, a thousand, a million, whatever. God looks on the heart. He simply wants to know, is our heart in His work? You see, what He's preparing us for are positions of responsibility, duties of service; and if He sees that we truly are supportive of Him and what He's doing, He knows that in the Kingdom that we will be also. We all wish that we could give more. There's not a one of us sitting here who on a holy day doesn't wish, "Well, boy, I wish I could double this or quadruple it or really bring the average up to a hundred dollars a head," and we realize that we don't have that type of money. I've known widows over the years who, proportionately to their income, on the holy day, have given huge offerings that...you take someone on a fixed income who doesn't have very much and, you know, they contribute a sizeable offering. It may not be as much as somebody else, but in proportion to their income, they're giving a huge amount. God sees that. God understands that. So all of us have an opportunity. It {*the amount*} doesn't have to be great. So through our tithes and our offerings, we can help in proclaiming in the gospel. Another way that the elderly have a unique opportunity is found back in **Luke**, the **second chapter**, beginning in **verse 36**. Let's notice this in verse 36. It says:

Luke 2:36-37 – *Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age...OK, anybody here of great age? Well, she was of great age. She had lived with a husband seven years...OK, she was married. Apparently had been married seven years and became a widow...from her virginity; and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years...OK, eighty-four, tack seven onto that, that's 91. How old was she when she got married? This woman's well over a hundred, so it says, *this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.**

She served God with prayers night and day. One of the unique opportunities sometimes that the elderly have is to have a little more time to pray and to beseech God for the needs of the work. Notice as verse 37 says here, that she did this night and day. Do we realize that our prayers are part of our spiritual service to God? When an individual is praying, God hears that, and that's just as important as how much money we give. If an individual fervently prays to God and asks God to bless His work, asks God to provide co-workers and donors, asks that God would continue to provide members, God hears that prayer. God could call one or two members who might be able to give a tremendous amount, as a direct result of the prayers of that individual. Our prayers are part of our spiritual service to God.

Hebrews, chapter 13, shows this. Hebrews 13, **verse 15**. Beginning in verse 15, it says:

Heb. 13:15-16 – *Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. You and I, when we pray to God, when we give thanks, we honor God, we extol God. God hears those prayers, and they are sacrifices that go up before Him. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. So our doing good and sharing and praying and acknowledging and extolling God are sacrifices.*

The elderly will generally have more time to pray. Sometimes they may not even be able to get down on their knees. I know many who have knee problems. I remember specifically one widow we had in the Big Sandy area who had some health problems, and she could not get down on her knees. I've sat in her home; and with tears coming down her face and crying, she would say, "I would like to get down on my knees and pray to God." How much she bemoaned that she couldn't. But we explained to her that whether you are on your knees, hanging from your foot in a well by a rope or whatever position you find yourself in, God hears your prayers. God knows. He knows the heart. And the principle is, if you could, you would; but if you are not able to, God understands that.

In the Big Sandy area, which I pastored prior to coming here, we had a group of widows who prayed and studied constantly. We have a lot of widows and elderly in that area, and I think that they are an amazing example to everyone around them, because you can go to their homes and you will find there's hardly a time you walk in that they've not got a Bible and literature out. They're studying, and I know that they spend a great deal of time praying. When there was something that needed to have God's help, they're the ones we'd go talk to, and say, "Would you pray for such and such," knowing, again, that they have that clout with God. What is more important: praying more or giving a few more dollars? Both are important. I'm not going to try to quantify one or another; but what God does is that He calls, He chooses those who can fulfill both roles. See, God calls those who are able to give. God calls those who are able to pray more. Both are fulfilling a need, a necessity, and a role within God's church. **Romans 12** clearly articulates this. Romans, chapter 12 and verse 3. Romans 12 is a parallel chapter to **I Corinthians 12** that talks about gifts. In both cases, they talk about different gifts, but let's notice here, beginning in verse 3:

Rom. 12:3-6 – *For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function...so all the members of the body do not have the same function. What that implies is, maybe God has called some to be able to support the work financially, others maybe not having much are able to support the work on their knees or through their prayers in beseeching God. As it goes on to say here, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them...and then it goes on to explain what some of these gifts are. So what you find, we all don't have the same function. We have different gifts, different opportunities to serve, different ways of serving; and so, we need to take advantage of those opportunities.*

All of us have opportunities to serve in different ways, and I have found over the years in the ministry that as I move laterally in different positions, different opportunities, that you are given different ways of serving and helping. And you move from some, you move to some, and you're able to serve in a different capacity. So it is as maybe we get older, we won't serve in the exact same way. I know that when I'm 70 and 80, I'm not going to be able to give two sermons on the Sabbath, pastor two or three churches, and visit night and day as we did when we were 20 or 30. You just simply are not capable of doing the same things, so you shift and you do and you serve in the way that you can.

I Timothy 5:5 ties in with this. I Timothy 5, and verse 5, talking about widows, and it says:

I Tim. 5:5 – *Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day.*

You see, a widow who's at home when you're out working 8 or 10 hours a day and you're caught in that traffic jam and you're sort of losing your cool because you can't get home, she's able to pray. And she has more time during night and day. The elderly many times also have more time to read and study. That's another opportunity that they have, to read and study. In Big Sandy, one of our widows has a little difficulty in getting around; and she has her easy chair, and on either side of that chair she has sort of like a book rack, and she has all of her Bibles over here, her commentaries, she has her tape recorder. She has all the church's literature over here on another side, and she sits there and sometimes 8 to 10 hours a day she studies, and she's listening to sermons, and she goes back and listens to old sermons. I'll guarantee you, when I was there pastoring the church that I had to be on my p's and q's because if I gave a sermon and I said something that wasn't exactly what she or others thought was right on, I'd get a phone call, and, "Could you explain..." And then, you know, I'd have to explain.

Here were ladies who were not deficient in any way in understanding the scriptures, but studied it and went over it and over it and over it constantly. She had at least three wide margin Bibles that she had gone through and taken all of her notes from one and marked

them in the next one, taking all those notes and marked them in another one and just kept going in studying her Bible. My wife's father, my father-in-law, Curtis Cowan, I don't know how many times he's read the Bible through—20, 30 times. He has difficulty sleeping. He'll get up at 4 in the morning and he'll sit there and he'll read for hours in the scriptures and pray. You know, these are not opportunities that many of us have; but, even though you might have an affliction that way, you can turn it into something that is helpful or can be helpful.

Many of us are really hard pressed for time to read and keep up with what's published. How many of us read all the booklets and publications that come out? It seems like a torrent that comes out, and many of us have trouble keeping up with it. Yet, many times the elderly are able to read those things. I know, because occasionally something would be written in the *United News* that one of our widows at Big Sandy would call me up, "Why did they say this? I'm not sure this is exactly right." It wouldn't be criticism, it would just be, "I wonder about this," and she would ask for an explanation.

The elderly and the older widows can also give themselves totally to God without distraction. That's another advantage, to be able to give yourself to God totally and without distraction. Paul explains this principle in **I Corinthians 7** when he talks about widows. He's not delineating age here. I Corinthians 7, beginning in **verse 33**. It says:

I Cor. 7:33-35 – *But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please his wife. When you're married, you've got your children, your wife, your mate; and you're trying to please them and you're thinking about them. There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world—how she may please her husband. We're not saying this is wrong, you know. That's not the point. The point is, those who maybe have been married and are no longer married or not yet married and are at home would have more time to devote to God. And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction.*

So that's the point that he is making, that they might be able to serve God without distraction, who have other opportunities and ways that those who are married, those who have families, do not have.

Now, many times the elderly can serve. I mean, I look around the audience here; and we have many whom some might classify as elderly who are very vital and still have the opportunity to serve; and so, all of us should serve whenever possible and health permits. God knows all of our circumstances; and, again, I have sat with many who have had health problems, who wished they could do more. God understands what we can do. He also looks on the heart, and He knows if we could, we would; and so God is not evaluating us by what we were able to do years ago when we had our health. He understands.

Let's notice in **I Timothy 5**, talking about the widows who were taken into a group or a class for service within the church. I Timothy 5:9 says:

I Tim. 5:9-10 – *Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number...apparently a special group who were set aside for special services in the church, 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.* So you find good works described here, again, as health and opportunity permit.

Let me just delineate a few ways that sometimes a person might be able to help. What about sometimes babysitting or helping the sick, as far as maybe taking in ironing and washing? We had an elderly lady in Richmond, Virginia, who took care of the elderly. She served "meals-on-wheels" and drove around delivering these meals. Now, she was in her late seventies when she was doing this, and she continued to do this well into her eighties. Her common expression was, she would say, "Somebody's got to look after these old people." And she would do it. Sometimes these old people were in their sixties, and she was ten, fifteen years older than they were; but they had some health problems.

So depending again on what you can do...you know, we don't want to limit ourselves. Sometimes there are things that we can do.

Sometimes we might be able to stay with a new mother to help her or cook, bake and sew. We've had widows over the years who have had a reputation for writing hundreds of cards and letters, having an extensive mailing list, whereby they would write the ministry worldwide and members worldwide and encourage them. I remember different ones that we had in Pasadena when we were students that were just so well known for this that they were just writing every day. Just constantly writing notes. Didn't have to be long letters, but they would write these, and they would keep everybody up and they would be an encouragement. You know, just the fact that we pray and that we can write and we might be able to encourage. Sometimes a person might say, "Well, that's not very much." But if that's what you can do, that's what God expects you to do. If we can help in that way, that would be a wonderful way of service. Again, all of us serve and we fulfill the function that we can in the body where God has placed us.

Let's notice in **Titus, chapter 2**. Titus, the second chapter, and we'll begin to read here in verse 1. Here are some instructions as to how to conduct ourselves within the church:

Titus 2:1-5 – *But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things...imparting the lessons and the wisdom and the knowledge that you've learned...that they admonish the young women, what? Well, 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. Then it goes on to talk about the young men and women and so on.

So, basically, we find that those who are older ought to be able to pass on to the younger generation their wisdom; but, sad to say, so often, the younger generation thinks they know more than the older. And in some things, they may; but with the life experience that people have gone through, the lessons that they have learned, you know, we should all make it a point to seek out those that we find in the congregation and get acquainted with them and learn from them.

I've sat enthralled...you would be amazed at some of the people we have in the congregations, some of the things they've done, what they've gone through. I remember one elderly woman that my wife talked to who, (I didn't realize this until after she had talked to her), but {she had} given birth to a baby in a blinding snowstorm, being pulled—you've seen these pictures of Indians where they have a couple of sticks, a tripod type of thing and cloth thrown over it and they're pulling someone—well, she was being pulled through the snow by her husband, trying to get her to a doctor, delivering a baby. You find out some of the experiences that people have gone through, what they have endured; and you can draw strength, you can draw energy, you can draw inspiration. You will be inspired, and we need to do that. Too often the elderly are sort of shuttled aside, forgotten about. "They don't know anything." And that's absolutely not true. There's so much that all of us can learn from them.

What should we do for the elderly? What can all of us do to help those? Well, again, I ask, why doesn't God just call the young, the rich, and the famous—none of us would be here under those circumstances...one of those would disqualify us—into His church? Well, going back to **I Corinthians 12** and **verse 18**, we read in verse 18 that it's God who calls and puts us in the church. Read it again:

I Cor. 12:18 – *But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased, as He wants. And then verse 21, And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."* The twenty-year-old can't say to the eighty-year-old, "I have no need of you." The thirty-year-old cannot say to the seventy-year-old, "You're not needed." Or vice versa, the eighty-year-old to the twenty.

Verses 22-23 – *No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. All are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty...*

Let me ask you, which part of the body is not necessary? Are your feet not necessary? I think they are. What about your hands? Are they not necessary? Your eyes, tongue, ears, hair, kneecaps, you know, whatever you can think of? All parts of the body are necessary. We understand that in the human body. So it is in the spiritual body, the church. Every

part is necessary. Every part performs a function. The hands have a function. The feet have a function. The nose has a function. The ears, hair, and so on. Every part of the body serves a function; and when we all perform that function, then the body is able to work together very well.

Notice in **verse 23**, it says, again, *And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor...verses 24-25, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.*

Now, notice why God has placed all of the members in the body—so that we can learn to care for one another, we can learn to love one another, we can learn to appreciate one another. You know, families need to train their children to and to care for the elderly. It is not natural. Young people do not grow up naturally learning to love those who are older. We need to teach them to have the right motives, the right attitude, the right emotional responses. These things just don't happen. They have to be learned. How do you teach a child to learn to love the elderly? Well, it starts when they are very young. What about taking your children, occasionally, to a rest home? If you ever go to a rest home to visit someone who is elderly, take your children. Let them see them. Talk to them about what the elderly go through. Invite them *{the elderly}* over to your house. Do projects as a family for a widow or an elderly person, such as, "Well, we've got Widow Jones over here. We're going to bake cookies for her," and have your child involved, where they may take the sack and they go up to the door and they give it to them. Teach them to respect those who are in authority.

What about, as a family, you pray together for somebody who's, you know, widower Jones has a certain problem, maybe a health problem, so all of you get down as a family and you pray for that person. And in these ways you begin to help them to focus. They're not going to learn these things naturally unless someone begins to show them the right way, begins to teach them.

As **James 1:27** says—we're all familiar with this particular scripture:

James 1:27 – *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.*

I think there is a great neglect in God's church, and that is that we do not visit the widows, the orphans, those who are needy in these positions. We need to visit them. Do we all take it upon ourselves as a responsibility to visit or to call or to write somebody? You know, if we did it once a week, pick the phone up and call somebody whom we know is living alone who might be lonely, and just talk to them or write them a note or invite them over for dinner or to visit, especially, who might live in our area. If we all did this, I'll guarantee you that our older people would be much encouraged.

Many elderly are lonely, they're neglected, they feel useless, they don't feel like they can contribute much to society, but they are an important part of the church, and they are future rulers in the Kingdom of God, just like you, just like me, like all of us. They may need occasional help with their home or yard or shopping or a ride to a doctor. How can we know that, again, unless we become acquainted with them, unless we get to know them.

I want you to notice a wonderful statement back here in the book of Job, **Job 29, verses 12-13**. Job is, in a sense, defending himself here. He's talking about all his good deeds and what he has done. He says:

Job 29:12-13 – *Because I delivered the poor who cried out, the fatherless and the one who had no helper. Now verse 13: The blessing of a perishing man came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.*

What a statement to make, that you helped someone so much that they sang for joy over what you were able to do. One of the great commandments deals indirectly with widows and widowers. In **Exodus 20**, the Ten Commandments are given, and it says to honor your father and mother. As I mentioned earlier, tomorrow is Mother's Day in the United States. It's a day dedicated to showing honor and respect to our parents, especially to our mothers. But this is something that we should do to the elderly—do to all men, but especially those—365 days a year. All of our mothers are potential widows. My mother became a widow. My dad died six years prior to her death, and she was a widow for that period of time. All of us have that potential. Your wife is a potential widow. Statistically, fellows, you and I are going to go first. It doesn't always happen that way, but that's the way it happens in most cases; and you will leave a widow. How would you want her to be treated when you're dead? Ask yourself, how do you want your wife to be treated? How do you want your mom to be treated when you are no longer here to look after her? Would you not want somebody to show them concern and love and help them.

One of the best ways we can help a wife, of course, is to provide for her before she becomes a widow, to have insurance, wise financial planning, be out of debt, any number of things we might do to help her when she becomes a widow. The trauma of widowhood—there's the loss of a companion; all the bills, debts, financial planning now fall on her shoulders; loneliness; an emotional trauma that people go through. Many times children are grown or away from home; or, if it's a younger widow, she has all the responsibility of rearing the children, taking care of everything now. Two great needs of widows and elderly in general: number one is financial; number two I would call human needs—to be loved, to feel useful, to have friends, to have dignity—and all of these areas are so very important. Brethren, you and I can help in both ways. We can help by providing the emotional support, doing what we can. You know, we have an assistance fund. The Bible talks about a third tithe. It talks about helping the needy all through the scriptures, a number of scriptures that we could go to to discuss these things. But God shows that there is a responsibility, there is a duty that we all have toward one another in assisting and in helping in these ways, and there should not be a neglect in the church of

those who are needy and those who are the widows. That is the responsibility that we as a church share, and you as a family...you know, the Bible in **I Timothy 5** says that if you have a widow in your family, then it is your responsibility first of all to take care of that individual to the best of your ability, and then whatever is lacking the church will step in and help. And especially to help those who are widows indeed. But none of us should shirk our responsibility.

So, brethren, we are one family as a church; and as a family, we're the family of God. One of the things that God is teaching us is to learn to and concern for every member of that family. It doesn't matter what their age, what their color, what their nationality, who they are—we are to show that love and that concern. We need to teach our children as they grow up to respect the elderly, to love them and to serve them. We need to do our part in visiting, serving, and helping. Remember this: even though we need to make sure that they are looked after financially, money cannot substitute for human contact, for human love and concern. The elderly are a vital part of the church. They perform a function within the church. As I said earlier, we want them praying FOR us, not AGAINST us; so let's make sure that, {*when it comes to*} all of our widows, the elderly, {we} can say what Job said, "We made the widow's heart sing with joy."