

"Honor ... Widows Indeed"

"... But if any widows have children or grandchildren, let them learn first to show piety toward their own family, and to requite their parents: for this is acceptable in the sight of God" (1 Tim. 5:3f). James wrote, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27) The first real internal issue that could have become an explosive problem for the infant church had not the apostles judiciously handled it is found in these words: "Now in these days, when the number of the disciples were multiplying, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians Jews against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration" (Acts 6:1f).

The compassion of Jesus for widows is amply testified of. He had pity for the widow of Nain in the loss of her only son (Lk. 7:11). He commended the poor widow for the two mites she gave God (Mk. 12:42). He taught us persistence in prayer by His parable of the widow who constantly pelted an unjust judge with her request: *"Avenge me of mine adversary"* (Lk. 18:3). Since Jesus *"left us an example that we should follow his steps,"* we must also show mercy to the widows and fatherless (1 Pet. 2:21). Jesus leveled a caustic, severe criticism against the Pharisees because of their heartless treatment of widows for they, said he, *"devour widows' houses"* (Mt. 23:14).

The care of widows and fatherless is a work which justifies study. And, in view of Paul's instructions, as to the who should or should not be enrolled *"in the number"* it is needful we consider several questions. First, who are *"widows indeed"*? Second, are there some widows who are not *"widows indeed"* but who the church may help? Third, may any one aside from a *"widows indeed"* be assisted by the church? Fourth, are some widows not the subject of church benevolence?

Consider the third question: *"May any aside from a 'widow indeed' be assisted by the church?"* The answer is "Yes." It is not solely *"widows indeed"* whom the church may aid for *"as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them and brought the price of the things that were sold and laid them at the Apostles' feet and distribution was made to all, according as any had need"* (Acts 4:34f). The disciples in Antioch determined to send relief unto brethren who dwelt in Judaea (Acts 11:29). The Corinthians were instructed, *"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I gave order ..."* (1 Cor. 16:1f). Brethren and saints were the recipients of aid from churches, and these terms include men and women. Thus, answering question three also answers question two: *"Are there some widows who are*

not widows indeed who can be helped by the church?" Yes, in some special occasions.

But one objects, "Paul enjoined that only 'widows indeed' be helped." This is not precisely correct. Paul commanded that only "*those who are widows indeed be enrolled;*" he did not forbid the emergency help which often is needed because some crisis has arisen to one who was not a widow indeed. Sometimes our health deteriorates, our fortunes are reversed, and temporary aid is necessary; it is scriptural that brethren or churches assist. But, there is aid which is of a permanent nature. Those who received that aid were identified as "*widows indeed.*"

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