

# Role of Widows and Orphans- Nigeria 2019

The first thing to understand as a widow or an orphan is that you have a significant place in the church of Jesus Christ. The body is made up of many members and each one of those members is a crucial part of the body. So as part of the body of Christ, you are a crucial part of the body. It's easy to feel, if you're a widow or orphan, that you're separate from the body, that because you need help that you're not part of the body, but God actually says the opposite. He says that the weaker parts of the body, that they're important parts of the body. 1 Corinthians 12:21-22, "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." No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary." Widows are an important part of the body of Jesus Christ, orphans are an important part of the body of Jesus Christ. This is a crucial thing to understand. In America what has happened is that the government takes care of widows and orphans and that has damaged the church in America. As a church, for years we prayed for the ability to help widows and orphans because God says they are necessary for the body and one of the reasons I am here today is because God answered that prayer because in Nigeria the church can help widows and orphans. When I started coming over here because we provided artificial limbs for widows and orphans, God answered our prayer because we needed the weaker parts of the body that in the United States the government has split off from the church and the church needs the weaker parts of the body. Verse 23, "And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty." The Holy Spirit, through Paul, is using the example of the body and ever since the fall there have been certain parts of the body that are to be covered. Paul is saying there is a reason for this, the reason that they are to be covered is to give them honor and he's drawing that as a picture in the church. The people in need were suffering, they don't stand in front, they don't have prominent roles, but they are a necessary part because it's necessary for the church to care for widows and orphans. Not just widows and orphans, but any of the weaker parts of the body. It's the mercy of God that He allows the church to minister to those in need and it can be hard to go and admit that you have needs, but one of the most key parts of widows and orphans in the church is to admit your needs so the church can show the love of Christ. God puts widows and orphans in the church so those with greater resources can help those with less. This is a picture of the unrepresentable parts, the parts that we cover, they are just as important as the mouth, the eyes, and the ears. The body needs every single part, be the part of the body that God has called you to be. It's crucial for the health of the church. As Paul said in verse 26, "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it." If you are suffering, if you have needs, you have a responsibility to take it to the church because as the body, when one part suffers, the rest suffers. When the church fails to care for the widow and orphan in their distress, the church should understand how God looks at that. 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." When you're in distress, when you have needs, this doesn't mean when you want things you can't have, but have real needs, let others practice pure religion, let others help you. One of your key roles is to let your needs be known to the church. Sometimes

they won't help you because they don't have the resources, or they are neglecting their duty, but it's still your duty to make your distress known. There are great promises that God makes to widows and orphans. Deuteronomy 10:18, "He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing." God blesses widows and orphans. The way the world is ordered is that blessings should come from the church, but God is just even if the church is not. Psalm 68:5, "A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, Is God in His holy habitation." Then He explains why you are supposed to sing praise to His name, because He is the Father to the fatherless, He is the Defender of widows, and God is in His holy habitation, He is ruling in heaven and earth and He cares for widows and orphans and that's why He commands the church to care for widows and orphans. But widows and orphans have responsibilities as well, the same as other people, you still have a responsibility to be faithful to God, to trust in God, to have faith in God, but the church has the responsibility to help all widows and orphans, all strangers, all that are suffering, but that doesn't change your responsibility to Jesus Christ. You might not have naira to give, but you have your prayers to give. You may not have naira to give, but you have your voice to give praise in song. Make sure you are faithful with what God has given you. The church of Jesus Christ is commanded to honor widows in a certain way. 1 Timothy 5:3-4, "Honor widows who are really widows. But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God." God does not want the church to undermine the family. This doesn't mean if you only have small children, but the case where you have grown children, your children have the first duty to care for your parents. The church can sin against a young man or young woman whose mother is a widow by providing for her so her children don't feel the weight of the responsibility. It can be a way that the church teaches young men and women to be godless. Now, there are some that have never been part of the faith or have left the faith and then the church should help the widow, but if the widow has grown children it is their duty first to take care of their mother or grandmother. It's a way to repay their parents. It continues in verse 5, "Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day." A widow has a greater understanding of her dependence on God. It's easy to depend on your own strength, but as you get older and your husband passes away, it's easier to see your dependence on God. One of the roles of a widow in the church is that she can pray with a greater fervency, that has an understanding of her reliance and need for God to care for and provide for her. Then it does give a warning in verse 6, "But she who lives in [a]pleasure is dead while she lives." Part of losing your husband is a test of your faith, whether it is real or it is false. If it's real, the death of your husband causes you to turn to God. If it causes you to turn to pleasure rather than prayer, it's a sign that you're not saved. When God puts tragedy in our life, it tests us, it's a check to see if we are truly standing on the rock of Christ, are we standing on our own understanding and what we desire? When tragedy comes in our life, the death of a father or husband, it forces us to say who we trust. Then it goes on to say that certain widows should not have to provide for themselves anymore. Verse 9, "Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man." The number there is the widows that will be supported by and provided for by the church. Verse 10-14, "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. But refuse

the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not. Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully." God is really clear, if you are of a certain age and you have been faithful in the duties that God has given you to do, the church is to be faithful to you by providing for your needs. If you have not been faithful, if you have not been diligent in raising your children, if you haven't shown hospitality to strangers, if you have not cared for those who are suffering, then God says the church is not supposed to care for all your needs. You are to go and do the work because you failed to do the work you are supposed to do. You're widows, warn the women who are not widows. I don't know if it's true in Nigeria, but something like 80% of wives end up being widows. The husbands tend to be older than the wife when they get married and without divorce, women tend to live longer than men so most women end up being widows so warn the younger wives to be diligent in their work for God so they have a valid claim on the church. When you think of the command God gives to women in Titus 2, He gives older women the responsibility to teach younger women. As older women, those of you that are older women, make sure you teach this to the younger women, that what you sow you will also reap. That is how God ordered the world and this is why sons and daughters frequently won't care for their parents. It's sin, but a lot of times they don't think they have a debt to repay because they don't see their mother sacrifice for them. Warn the wives. I also want to go to another example in Acts 9. In Acts 9 is a story of when Peter goes to Joppa because a woman dies, and we don't know for sure if she is a widow, but the description sounds like she is a widow. We don't hear anything about her family, but we hear the whole city mourning, but we don't hear anything about her family. Her husband, brother, or children go to get Peter, just the church sends for Peter. I think the description of who is truly a widow is a description of her in Acts 9:39, "Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them." Dorcas didn't say she lost her husband so therefore she had no more responsibility, she is held up in Acts as one of the great women in Scripture because even in her distress and difficulty, her mind was on serving others. She may not have had a lot of money to give, but she had her labor to give so she cared for widows in their distress. Just because you are a widow doesn't mean there is nothing you can do for God. It says in verse 36, "At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did." God has still given you hands to labor with, God has still given some of you the ability to bless others. Every Christian widow should be a blessing to others through prayer, but a lot can do more than that, a lot can use their labor to glorify God. Just like before your husband died, you could minister to your husband, now you can still minister to your Husband because God said He is the Husband to the widow. Especially older orphans, you can still minister to your Father because God says He is the Father to the fatherless. Just because you are part of the body that has greater needs, it doesn't mean there aren't other ways for you to serve the body. The whole basis of the Christian life is die to yourself and live for Christ. That's what every part of the body is to do. I may be the part of the body that is the mouth, I may travel to places to speak, but I'm not any more worthy of honor

than you are. 1 Corinthians 12 says the hidden parts of the body have greater honor than the visible parts of the body, but make sure you are part of the body. Die to yourself and live for Christ because that's what it means to be a Christian.

Oh Lord God, we do thank You that You have brought these widows and orphans this morning, how the church can show Your mercy and grace by being faithful to these women and children. You have given them this opportunity and I pray that You convict Your church in Miango is faithful to them. Lord, I pray that You're close to them as a father is to a child, as You are the Father to the fatherless. I pray You are close to the widows like a husband is because You are the Husband to the widows. I pray each person here gets a greater view of who You are, each of us here has a greater understanding of Your holiness and Your mercy and Your love and Your care for the widows and orphans. Lord, pour out Your blessings on them. For those who do not know Your Son, those who have not looked to Jesus Christ to be saved, reveal Yourself to them so they flee to You. Lord, we pray that You glorify Your name through these people here because they are a crucial part of Your body. Lord we pray Your blessings on this body, amen.

Question and Answers:

1. If her husband dies and her local church doesn't visit her, what responsibility do other Christians have to come visit her?

True Christians visit widows and orphans in their distress. If you look at Matthew 25, says when God comes and separates the sheep and the goats, He will do this based on those who saw someone in need- food, drink, clothing- that those who are His will give them food, give them drink, give them clothes, give them housing, and will visit them. It's a rebuke on your local church because faithful Christians came and visited you and those who had the greatest duty, they failed to fulfill their responsibility before Christ. That should be a true warning to them if they have true religion because pure religion before God and man is to help the widow and orphan in their distress. May the church hear God's rebuke.

2. Her husband died and his brothers collected his funds from her and someone else is helping her feed the children. Is this something that should be brought up to his pastor or to her pastor?

The duty of the church is to step in in that case. One of the things that I'm going to talk about this afternoon is doing member care well for the elders. One of the most basic things that the church can do for its members is to be just. The right place to appeal what is happening is to her husband's brother's church, where he goes because stealing from a widow is a serious offense in the eyes of God. It's a mercy to them to warn them of the wrath of God because God says

what He does to those who abuse widows. So my suggestion would be to appeal to her husband's brother's church and pray to God that they are faithful to him.

3. She's a widow under 60, and her own mother is a widow. She wants to take care of her, but does she accept help from the church?

The short answer is that the church should be evaluating your situation. God has given us principles in His Word such as the 60 years and older and such as that you have children, they should be taking care of the widow, but God has also put real authorities in the church. He has given elders and pastors so they can look at complicated situations such as yours, always understanding that you do justice for widows and to say in this particular situation what the right thing to do is.

4. She has children and then she is not over 60, but she desires to marry, but the man is a widower, his wife died and he has children. She has children too so because of the children on both sides, the person may not desire to marry her anymore. She is not strong, that's why she wants to marry, but the man doesn't want to marry because he has children to take care of. What is the church to do?

There's a few things there. One is, Paul is explicit in 1 Timothy that younger widows should marry. He is writing this to Timothy as the leader of a church so the church has a duty to help widows find husbands, including the situation where the man says he is not sure if he will be able to provide for this number of children. If the church is helping the widow, the church should also help the family until it's established. God gave the command to the church to help widows get married and part of that is just encouraging the man to have faith because God says that He gives us our daily bread. If we're faithful to do what God would have us to do, He promises we will get what we need.

5. There's a widow who somebody is helping her, they are not married, what should the church be doing?

1 Timothy 5 talks about a woman that's chasing after a man, she is not to be helped by the church.

6. There is help and fellowship for widows to encourage each other, but some of the younger widows don't come to fellowship, but want to share what the older widows get from the church.

A lot of these questions get into detail that's hard to answer. What's clear from Scripture is not so much that you cut out the younger widows from support because they don't fellowship, but it is clear that you don't help all the widows the same. A widow who is over 60 who doesn't have children and is faithful in the faith, she should have all the support she needs. Then support goes to other widows as their needs are seen. The cutting off of the younger widows is because

they are chasing after men or they are using it to be idle so they can be gossips or busybodies. So we shouldn't say we have 50 widows and 5,000 naira so we will give 100 naira to each.

#### 7. ??

The marriage between a man and a woman is a picture of Christ and the church. It's a picture of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's good to have that picture if you are 70 or if you are 20. The obligation of the church doesn't mean you cannot marry because God said this is a picture of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Marriage is honorable.

8. There are widows that have 5-8 children and they are struggling to school the children. They are into drugs and other things and they are struggling to raise them. The widow is not old, but she has a responsibility. What does she do?

One thing that the broader church has to remember is that we are members of one another and as one of the pastor's said before, we need to talk about this among the elders. Especially boys, they need a man to help raise them and what this means is that the church needs to recognize each part of the body needs other parts of the body. Other families should be helping a family of a widow with eight children, not necessarily with sending them to school because it's a lack of constraint that caused them to go to drugs, not a lack of education. It can be very hard for a mother to discipline a 12 year old boy and the other men in the church need to come alongside and help the widow because we are members of one body. A key duty of pastors is to be teaching their flock their obligation to one another and especially to widows and the fatherless. God judges the church on how it deals with the fatherless so the solution is for the church to act like the church.

#### 9. ??

One of the basic problems is a church that won't do discipline on its members, the Bible is very clear. 1 Corinthians 6:9, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites." That widow and the man are not Christians and they must be put out of the church. That's what stops the problem. If the church closes its eyes to it, it just gets worse. When it's accepted in the church, there will be adultery and fornication in the culture. The solution to the problem is the church acting like the church and putting out those who are not part of the church.

My main encouragement to you is that God has a role for widows. God has a role for orphans. Your role is to allow the church to demonstrate what love means. It can be hard to have that duty when the church is weak. It can mean they are suffering and there are difficulties, but trust that God has a purpose for it and you have a real role in the healing and strengthening of the church for when the widows and orphans are not cared for by the church, it is a real rebuke to

the church. It's by rebuke that conviction and repentance comes. So my encouragement is to persevere because God is the Husband to the widow and He is the Father to the fatherless and God rules in the world and His will will be done. Praise God.