

**BIBLE WOMEN – NEW TESTAMENT**  
**The Widow's Mite / Phoebe / Lois and Eunice**  
**Lesson 22 – By Beverly McKey**

**I. THE POOR WIDOW – Mark 12:41-44, Luke 21:1-4**

The account of this poor widow occurred while Jesus was still on earth, however, I postponed her story for this lesson.

This woman fits closely with the other women we will discuss today who were dedicated to the work of establishing and serving in the church during the first century

As we have learned in this series of lessons on Bible Women, there were many women who have been extremely instrumental in the development of God's chosen nation of Israel in the Old Testament, as well as helping establishing congregations and serving in the New Testament church.

Directly prior to the account of the Poor Widow, Jesus was teaching in a synagogue. **Luke 20**

The chief priests, the scribes and the elders confronted Jesus asking *"Tell us, by what authority are You doing these things Or who is he who gave You this authority."*

These Jews challenged His authority because they did not believe Him to be the of the Son of God.

Then they asked other difficult questions they thought would prove that He was a fraud.

Should we pay taxes to Caesar or not? **Vs. 22**

They gave a hypothetical question about a widow whose husband died, then she married his brother and he died, then she married another of his brothers and so on through seven husbands?

*"Whose wife will she be in the resurrection?"* **Vs. 27-33**

Following this exchange, Jesus warned the people, *"Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."*

These Jews were self-righteous men who thought themselves better than other Jews and they loved to show their righteousness to everyone by calling attention to their long prayers, to their knowledge of the scriptures and their position of authority in the synagogue Besides their hypocrisy, Jesus accused them of "devouring widow' houses". What does that mean?

This Jews of that day understood it's meaning but over time, it has become an obscure idea.

In Hebrew, the word for “house” may not only mean a physical structure; it may also mean a household, family, clan or estate (all the members of the house).

Perhaps an example from **II Kings 4:1** will help us understand.

*A certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, saying, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the LORD. And the creditor is coming to take my two sons to be his slaves."*

- a) This practice of robbing a widow of her sons so that she had no one to help provide a living for her was an example of “devouring the widow’s household”.
  - b) Another method of “devouring a widow’s house” was the regulations the Jewish leaders created which allowed them to compel widows to transfer ownership (confiscate) a widow’s before they would provide the help she needed day-to-day.
- 2) We may think that this does not happen today, but consider this example:
- a) Approximately twenty-five years ago a very large Church of Christ in Texas committed to build a facility that cost \$13,000,000.
  - b) In order to finance this building they encouraged Christians to buy interest-bearing bonds as an investment for themselves as well as financing the building.
  - c) Many faithful elderly Christians thought this would be a good use of their savings and would earn income for their retirement years and they invested very large sums of money.
  - d) Unfortunately many (maybe none) actually ever received the interest payments they were promised.
  - e) They wrote letters to the elders asking why they received no interest, since they needed the income.
  - f) Some even claimed that they had to sell their homes in order to survive financially.
  - g) This issue ended up in a federal court in an effort to get an answer for their problem.
  - h) I don’t know how the case was resolved, but how shameful that elders would allow their failure to keep their word to be brought to civil court.
  - i) They rationalized their failure to keep their word by blaming unforeseen economic issues, when they really were simply extravagant with the funds entrusted to them.
  - j) No federal judgment can excuse or forgive the elders from their responsibility of cheating fellow Christians. They will always be accountable to God.

Following the scathing condemnation of the leaders of the Jews, Jesus turned his attention toward those who were putting money into the treasury.

Many who were rich put in a lot of money – which was to be set aside for the care of the poor.

Then came one poor widow who threw in two mites.

A mite was the smallest coin in value of all of the currency of the day (similar to our penny in comparison).

It is likely that no one was paying any attention to this poor widow as she made her meager donation – no one but Jesus.

Because Jesus knew each person's circumstances and their heart as they gave, he called his disciples to himself in order to point out a very important lesson to them.

**Vs. 43-44** – *"Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; <sup>44</sup> for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."*

It is human nature to be impressed with very large contributions.

Jesus, however, looked more deeply than the amount of the gift.

He wanted His disciples to learn to do this also, so he pointed out how he saw the gifts.

Everyone, except the widow, who put money in the treasury gave out of their abundance.

Jesus was not criticizing the gifts of the rich. He was simply not impressed by the size of their gift.

After all, they had plenty more money left to take care of their families' needs, in fact they lived in luxury.

In comparison, this widow had given the largest gift of all because it was all she had.

Jesus saw the gifts not as "amounts" but as "percentages":

- a) If one person has only \$1,000 and gives \$100 that is great.
- b) But if another person has only \$100 and gives \$10, his gift is equal to the gift of the richer man.
- c) But Jesus saw this widow's gift as equal to a man who only had \$1,000 and he gave \$1,000.

Her gift was so amazing to Jesus because it revealed her heart.

- a) One would expect a widow this poor to feel that she could not afford to give anything to support the poor – after all who was poorer than she?
- b) If she was known as a very generous and kind woman, one might expect to see her give ONE of her two mites to the poor.
- c) But this woman gave everything she had because she had such a strong faith in God that she trusted Him to provide her with enough to sustain her life.

d) She knew that God had made special laws to ensure that the widows and orphans would be taken care of by His faithful people and she did not doubt that she would be provided with her basic needs.

This poor widow was the exact opposite example of the rich young ruler who approached Jesus asking "*What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?*" **Matthew 19:16-22**

a) When he was told to sell all he had and give it to the poor, then follow Jesus, he went away sad "*for he had great possessions.*" **Vs. 22**

b) He could not part with his wealth, even to get eternal life.

c) On the other hand, this widow could not keep her two coins because she considered them gifts from God anyway.

While this poor widow was still living under the old covenant (Judaism), her example is relevant to Christians today.

1. Unlike Christians, Jews were required by the Law of Moses to "tithes" ten percent of everything they received as an increase (wages, new born animals, harvested crops, etc)
2. While we understand the lesson of the Rich Young Ruler, we know that no one is ever commanded to give ALL he has to the poor in order to be pleasing to God.
3. The New Testament church is commanded to "give as one prospers" or according to what he has. **I Corinthians 16:2**
4. We are to be the judge of our own prosperity, however, Jesus has given us a principle to apply to our judgment.

**Luke 12:48** – "*For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.*"

5. Paul also taught generosity as well as attitude. He emphasizes that gifts should not be given grudgingly or under compulsion, but cheerfully: **II Corinthians 9:6-8** – "<sup>6</sup> *But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.* <sup>7</sup> *So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.* <sup>8</sup> *And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.*"
6. And yet, Paul also explained that the requirement for generosity in giving is NOT meant to cause poverty for the giver in order to help those in poverty.

**2 Corinthians 8:13-15** – "<sup>13</sup> *For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; <sup>14</sup> but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality.* <sup>15</sup> *As it is written, "He who*

*gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack."*

7. Paul wanted all Christians to know that those who contribute out of their abundance may one day be in need themselves. At that point, their brothers and sisters in Christ would then show their generosity by relieving their need.
8. This teaching is simply based on "reaping what you sow" or as we say today -- What goes around, comes around. Therefore, it is wise to be generous to those in need.

God offered the Jews a challenge to test His generosity in the days of the prophet Malachi, which we should remember today also.

**Malachi 3:10** – *"Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it."*

i Jesus also made such a challenge:

**Luke 6:38** – *"Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."*

ii We must learn to trust God like that poor widow:

**Matthew 6:25-27 & 33** – *<sup>25</sup>Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup>Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"*

*<sup>33</sup>But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*

iii Isn't it amazing how very many things we learned from this one poor widows act of generosity? What a legacy she left behind her.

## II. PHOEBE

A. **Acts 16:1** – *"I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, <sup>2</sup> that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also."*

1. Luke records this scripture that sounds very much like the greetings that Paul often included in his writings.
  - a. Here Paul recognizes the very important work that a sister in Christ has performed.
  - b. Phoebe is called a "servant of the church in Cenchrea".

- c. Paul asks the Christians in Rome to “assist her in whatever business she has need of you”.
- d. Paul confirms that she has helped many people, including himself.
2. Paul was in Corinth for the third time when he wrote the letter to Romans.
  - a. While Paul wrote many letters, there was no official postal service during that time of history.
  - b. Paul selected trustworthy Christians to hand deliver his letters.
  - c. It seems that Phoebe was the person Paul used to deliver his letter to Romans.
  - d. Bible scholars believe this to be the case, and considering that Paul said, *“I commend to you Phoebe, our sister...”*, which would be a way of introducing Phoebe to the church, it appears that she delivered the letter.
- B. One would think that this one verse of scripture would not leave much to be discussed, other than admiring Phoebe for her dedication to the work of spreading the gospel, however, there is much to be discussed regarding the misinterpretation of this verse.
  1. It is very difficult to understand how so many in denominational churches have introduced a very important false doctrine based on this verse.
  2. That false teaching is:
    - a. Phoebe was called “*a servant of the church in Cenchrea.*”
    - b. The word “servant” in the Greek language is “diakonos” which can be translated as deacon – therefore, Phoebe was a deaconess in the church of Cenchrea, and this authorizes women to hold the position of deacon, elder and pastors (preachers are incorrectly considered pastors in denominational churches).
  3. Now let us examine the word “diakonos” more closely.
    - a. The word “diakonos” is used thirty-one times in the New Testament and it is used in many different ways.
      - 1) **Colossians 1:23** – Paul called himself a minister (diakonos).
      - 2) **Romans 15:25** – Paul went to Jerusalem to serve (diakonos) the saints.
      - 3) **John 2:5** – Mary, the mother of Jesus, spoke to the servants (diakonos) at the wedding in Cana.
      - 4) **Luke 17:8 and Acts 6:2** – diakonos is used in reference to “serving tables”.
      - 5) **Mark 10:45** – Jesus came not to be served but to serve (diakonos).
      - 6) **Romans 13:4** – the government is called a minister (diakonos) of God.
      - 7) **Colossians 4:7** – Tychicus is a minister (diakonos) of the Lord.

- 8) **I Thessalonians 3:2** – Timothy is also called a minister (diakonos) of the Lord.
- b. It is obvious, then, that the use of the word “diakonos” when referring to Phoebe does not even suggest, much less prove that women are authorized to hold positions of authority in the church.
4. It is frightening when you learn the reason for their conclusions:
- a. Many not only believe that women were used in roles of authority in the first century, but they also believe that in *“the 4<sup>th</sup> century onward, male translators who had an inaccurate view of the role of women in the early church caused by the sad chipping away of women’s rights later in the first few centuries of Christianity, understood the word diakonos only with a view to the translator’s own context.”* According to Adam J Copeland, a minister of the Presbyterian church.
- b. Mr. Copeland believes that women have been denied positions of authority because of the prejudices of men against women.
- c. He also seems to believe that the word of God is skewed by the personal opinion of the translators, who had an “inaccurate view of the role of women” as it was intended by God.
- 1) Exactly how Mr. Copeland concludes that some verses are not what God meant, but were mistranslated by men who were prejudiced against women is unclear.
- 2) Does he consider Paul’s writings were “an inaccurate view of the role of women?”
- a) **I Corinthians 14:34** – *“Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says.”*
- b) **I Timothy 2:12** -- *“I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.”*
- d. It is irrational that so much weight is given to interpreting the word “diakonos” to definitely mean the “office of deacon”, when other passages clearly refute that idea.
- e. One thing is certain; if we cannot trust a carefully translated version of the Bible, which has made every effort to maintain the correct verbiage according to the context of the passage, then how can we trust any of the Bible to be translated correctly.
- f. While there are many unreliable translations of the Bible available, a devoted Christian will do a little research to find one that is considered trustworthy by a multitude of scholars fluent in the Greek and Hebrew languages.
5. Imagine how disappointed Phoebe would have been to know that her excellent example of service in the first century church was so twisted as to produce a widely accepted perversion of the doctrines God provided to us.

### III. EUNICE and LOIS

A. These two women are the mother (Eunice) and grandmother (Lois) of Timothy, whom Paul referred to as his son in the faith.

1. The first time we are introduced to this family, Timothy's mother is mentioned, but her name is not given.

**Acts 6:1-3** – *"Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek. <sup>2</sup> He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. <sup>3</sup> Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek."*

2. There are a few facts revealed here about Eunice:

a. She was a Jew, who had converted to Christianity.

b. She was married to a Greek (Gentile) man.

c. She lived in Lystra, which is today part of Turkey.

d. It appears that her husband did not become a Christian since Paul specifically identifies Timothy's mother as "a believer" while he describes her husband as "a Greek" (Gentile).

e. **Acts 14** tells of Paul's first visit to Lystra, where he taught the gospel; it is likely that Eunice became a Christian at that time.

f. From childhood, Eunice taught Timothy the scriptures. First, the scriptures of the Torah (the Law of Moses), and later when she was converted to Christianity, she taught him that as well.

3. Since Eunice was a Jew, married to a Gentile, she may have faced very strong opposition from her family because God had forbidden intermarriage with Gentiles.

a. In Orthodox Judaism, Jews who married Gentiles were considered "dead" to their own families.

b. **Deuteronomy 7:1-3** – *"You shall not intermarry with them: do not give your daughter to their sons or take their daughters for your sons. For your children will turn away from me to worship other gods."*

c. **Acts 16:3** verifies that Eunice did not have her son circumcised at birth as Jews were commanded to do, so Paul performed the circumcision on Timothy in order that the Jews they would be teaching would have no criticism of Timothy, since they knew his father was a Gentile.

1) Perhaps her husband did not encourage her to practice her Jewish belief. After all, every Jew knew that any male Jew who was not circumcised would be cut off from the Jewish nation. **Genesis**

**17:14**



- 2) While Eunice may have allowed her husband to influence her practice of Judaism, apparently she did not allow any negative influence keep her from faithfully serving God as a Christian.
  - 3) Eunice serves as a great example to all women today who are married to one who is not a Christian, or to one who has turned his back on God and the church.
    1. A Christian woman who is married to a non-believer must work even harder to let her Christian lifestyle be the very best example to her husband every day.
    2. **I Peter 3:1-2** – Peter commands this very same principle. *"Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, <sup>2</sup> when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear."*
    3. Since Eunice's teaching instilled great faith in her young son, Timothy, it is hard to imagine that her husband remained alienated to God for very long with both Eunice and Timothy making every effort to convert their beloved husband and father to Christianity.
- B. Approximately five years later, Paul returned to Lystra to encourage the church and appoint elders (as he did in many other churches).
1. It was on this second visit to Lystra when Paul decided that he wanted to take the young man, Timothy who was an adult, with him on his continuing journeys.
  2. This was the beginning of a lifelong relationship between Paul and Timothy, which only deepened as time passed.
- C. Lois was Timothy's grandmother and while we are not told whose mother she was (Eunice's or her husband's), the closeness of their relationship and their unity in Christianity seems to indicate that she was Lois' mother.
1. Timothy was indeed a fortunate young man since not only was he positively influenced by his mother, but his grandmother as well.
  2. Paul indicated that Lois was first to be converted to Christianity, since he said that Timothy's faith was "first in your grandmother Lois".
  3. Having a heritage of faith in God for two or more generations back in one's family is a blessing that may often not be fully appreciated.
    - a. My husband's family were Christians for at least three generations before him.
    - b. On the other hand, no one in my family had ever been a member of the Lord's church.
      - 1) My parents were not religious at all, nor were my mother's parents.
      - 2) My paternal grandfather was a Pentecostal preacher.

- 3) I credit my grandmother and grandfather for instilling in me a belief in God and the Bible, even though their doctrine was incorrect.
  - 4) I am grateful that my grandchildren have the benefit of Christian grandparents that can only add to the teaching they receive from their parents.
  - 5) We can never overemphasize the benefit our grandchildren have in Christian parents and grandparents.
  - 6) There is no way of estimating how many Christians were first influenced to become Christians by their grandparents.
- D. Lois may not have been in the “ideal” situation with an unbelieving husband, but no matter her circumstance, she was obligated to take on the responsibility of guiding the soul of her young son toward heaven.
1. Considering that most young mothers today are also working in the secular world, their job as wife and mother becomes more difficult.
  2. However, she cannot afford to cut corners or save time by omitting any worship service, Bible Class, Vacation Bible School or youth devotional that the church offers for the building of faith in her children.
  3. She also cannot afford to let her own Christian example be corrupted by worldly ambition and over-scheduling events that cause time limitations.
    - a. She cannot afford to leave the religious training of her children to the organized meetings of the church – she must bring it home every day of her life.
    - b. Consistency is the most important technique for teaching children religious and moral values.
    - c. Too often we push our children to get a good education or to excel in sports because we want them to be successful in life, but leave little time for Bible teaching in our homes.
    - d. This must not continue if the church is to grow and remain strong in the future.