

Church, Families, and Deacons

Let us listen attentively to the word of God. If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, but do not let the church be burdened that it may relieve those who are really widows. Let us pray.

And hear God as we read the end of this large section in which Paul explains to Timothy, who in turn should explain to the church the proper relationship between the church and family. We see here implicitly as well behind all this the use of the office of deacons as we see in Acts 6 that they were ordained and called upon to deal with a specific matter of widows. Our Lord and Savior, unto that end may we go over what is probably known to many of us or to remind us again if we have not been so clear in our thoughts of the office of deacon and its relationship to the church and to the families as we move through the book of 1 Timothy and after this verse we read about the elders as well so it seems appropriate to talk about deacons.

Help us we pray to further your kingdom and to see how we can be useful in your church even though we are not deacons. In your name we pray. Amen.

I recall a number of years ago a conversation with a Christian about deacons and their purpose and function. It seems that he did not like the view of the deacon that includes any work necessary for the church. Apparently some things were beneath him.

He seemed to think that deacons were only good for select noteworthy things. It was a strange conversation to me at the time because I myself was a deacon, probably a new deacon as I recall and never saw myself anything more than an official helper of the church. In fact that is how I became a deacon.

I was helping with the church here at Providence back in the 90s already in my own of course limited way at any rate. So the church upon careful examination believed I was gifted for that noble office. I bring this up for two points.

The first is that we can all help in various ways without being a deacon or pretending to be one or doing any particular function that is theirs because they do have some particular public things that they are called to do. Second there is a need for deacons to deal with those in need in an official public capacity. Verse 16 finishes up the theme as we saw here of the relationship between the widows and the church and of course the family as well because he is telling the families to take care of your family members and widows in particular.

From verse 1 onward Paul differentiates as you recall between the widow indeed and all other widows. If a widow needs help and has no family the church should assist yet even that assistance is only for certain widows with specific qualifications and if such are met then they are put on the official list to be taken care of in various ways that seem to be along the lines of basically giving them a living, a house and funds that they need to live. So this sermon that includes the idea of deacons as you heard my prayer seems to me to make sense.

Widow matter was brought up in the book of Acts. Acts 6.1. In those days when the number of the disciples was multiplied there were thousands and thousands of converts in a very short period of time. There was a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, not the Greeks but the Greek speaking Jews who weren't native to Jerusalem but spread across into Spora to Rome and Egypt and elsewhere.

That's what he's talking about, that distinction. Against the Hebrews, the locals, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. They weren't taking care of the local widows indeed.

Since the apostles had their own responsibilities, we read there in Acts 6, they ordained seven men to help with these widows. We call them deacons. The word deacons simply means servant.

It's pretty much right out of the Greek. Just keep learning new Greek words. It's right there.

That's the word. They are there to help. Let us look more carefully here to explain some matters and to avoid confusion on the relationship between the church, the family, and the deacon.

Of course I'm not going to be able to answer everything in this regard but want to set out in broad strokes the differences in the interrelationship between the three. So the first part, the church and families. The church and families.

Church and Families

Families of course are to take care of their own. This is a normal state of affairs. Paul is so confident of this that he asserts that if you don't take care of your own, provide for them in their time of need, by extension not just widows but of course your own kids and anybody else in your family that's needy, you're worse than an infidel.

You're worse than a pagan. They know better is the point. Even so, circumstances may arise in which there is widespread emergency and chaos and families may need to help other families, not just their own widows.

There was a tornado that struck recently apparently down south or maybe it was in Arkansas. I don't remember where exactly. Missouri.

Yeah, that's down south. Thank you. And what are you going to do? Just sit there and go, well, Paul just says take care of your family.

Does he mean only ever and under all circumstances? He means normal circumstances. Ordinarily, we say today. The state would help of course and if it's bad enough the church would help.

So I'm not going to close those doors. I don't believe the Bible closes doors and you see examples of help like that, but ordinarily. Paul is quite emphatic.

Churches ordinarily take care of a certain need for people here because the church has limited resources that's implied here. Do not let the church, verse 16, be burdened with these widows that they may relieve these other widows. Widows indeed that have risen to such an occasion and their circumstances and their qualifications that the church should indeed help them.

And it's not because the church is not a loving institution. Historically, at least in the last hundred years, say historically in America, the era of the mainline liberal churches that are still with us today, the Methodists, the Episcopalians, the liberal Presbyterian churches turned the good news into social activism. And that was back in the 1910s and 20s and 30s.

They're still doing it today and we see the fruits of it. They have no gospel but they have lots of social programs to help people locally or even destroy families as in the case of the queer agenda. They take these monies and these funds and help people indiscriminately because to discriminate is unloving.

That's pretty much what they taught and we have that kind of struggle right now in society if you notice. Discriminating, making distinction between myself and yourself, this nation and that nation, my community and your community with respect to funds, times and resources because they're limited. They're literally limited.

That's why Paul says don't burden the church. It takes time and effort in this regard. But that's the job of the families first to take care of those in need.

Local communities should gather together and they have food banks and things like that or the state. There's all kinds of variety of ways in which they can help or assist and the like. I'm not going to go into those details but to point out that that is there.

It's not just the church and the poor person. You've got the whole society here as we saw in Sunday School class. The light of nature in which people are supposed to take care of their own community.

Take care of your own whether small scale family or clan or a city and the like. We are called as a church formally and publicly to preach, to worship God together and to take care of our own under certain strictures as we see here in Chapter 5. And as with these limited resources, we have therefore limited ways in which to help people but it's especially I think to help them when things are really bad and they've got no one else and they have to have a place to live or something along the lines. So the other question that comes up then is what do families and widows do? There's a widow who can't get on the list.

Now what? Who helps the other widows the church does not help? I don't believe Paul is saying here in this description as you saw he talks about the one group of widows that she lives in pleasure she's dead while she lives or they learn to be idle wandering from house to house and gossips and the like he says here in verse 13. Now that's always the case but that's what he's worried about. You typically are concerned about the troublemakers or people going down serious sins and not people in the middle as it were that are in this case widows who don't fit the qualification.

They're not old enough. Maybe they have some sins in their life but they're not that bad, right? They're not profligate and just bums more or less. What about them? Who takes care of them? Paul says the family takes care of them.

The church cannot, should not that's ordinary rule. Families and friends however can put up with bad qualities that this list says you shouldn't in widows that are supposed to be put on the official church list to be taken care of. You can put up and understand.

You know their limitations. You know where they're going. You know their history.

You know the best way to help them financially or not financially. Maybe you're supposed to give them material things and not money because they're wasteful with money so you just give them food. You know these things in a way the church doesn't know and you can handle these things privately in a way the church can't because the church is using what? Public funds.

We all know the difference between private funds and the pastor dipping into the public funds. That's the kind of difference going on here. Between you taking care of the widows who aren't on the list who aren't maybe even a very bad widow.

They could be just a terrible like that terrible uncle. They're still family and you know what to do with it. Maybe under your qualifications you're like it's bad enough we're not even going to help them.

That's your call. It's between you and your family or your friends or your extended family and the like. But you are called to take care of everyone else that the widow list does not cover.

Is the point here. And these matters of the family and of friends are best done by them and to be done instead of a church officer. You may give sharp rebukes.

You may give gentle admonition. I don't know but you need to do something perhaps or perhaps nothing. I don't know.

It's your call. Second point. Churches and deacons.

Church and Deacons

So that's churches and families. More or less summarizing chapter 5 here. And giving some more reminders and details that you can still take care of these other widows who are even troublemakers.

That's between you and your family the best way to do that. Churches and deacons. By church here I mean the church organized.

The actual structure that we see in which there are officers, there are courts. There's a meeting called the session in which the officers gather together to deal with matters common to the church especially for spiritual matters. Pastors.

The public official authority structure is what we are talking about here. Not the church organic where we are all part of the church of God and we have friends in other churches and other denominations and you may end up between churches. You may end up without a church but you're still part of God's church and you're still Christian.

You've been baptized and the like. And you don't have an authority over you for temporary reasons or whatever the case is. That's still a church but it's more organic and not a structure.

Pastors. Ruling elders and deacons. So it seemed appropriate to me here as we're going to move to verse 17.

Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor especially those who labor in the word of doctrine. We're going to learn about the pastor and the ruling elder. Why not talk about deacons? It's one verse over.

It's implied it seems to me in verse 16. There's a list for the church for widows. We saw in Acts 6 widows were taken care of by these deacons.

So you get to hear about deacons a little bit here before we talk about the other offices. You can get all three offices from a Presbyterian perspective. Now these officers, the pastors, ruling elders, and deacons have individual and collective authority.

When I speak to you as a pastor and I'm admonishing you or encouraging you there's some oomph behind that. There should be because I have a public office and I'm wearing my public hat, right? But that's also a little different than if I speak along with the session. So we speak collectively and we say this is the way things are or this is not the way things are.

We explain ourselves. We admonish somebody like in the case of what? Church discipline. You don't expect the pastor to do all the church discipline.

You expect the ruling elder and the pastor together to have a proper information gathering and examination of the evidence so it's not just one guy calling the shots when it comes to discipline of church members which is unfortunately a big problem in some independent circles because there's wisdom in the counsel of many. So that's what we have here is authority both individual and collective and some churches have a deacon board not independent or shouldn't be independent. I mean you can always find exceptions.

People always run around and do something different and weird but a deacon board underneath the authority of course of the session so that they can coordinate things and be useful as deacons. So what is seen however, the way I look at it is this. What you see of course is the teaching, the ruling, and the discipline.

Not the full discipline process if it's a closed trial but typically they're open. They shouldn't be closed unless it's something very sensitive, atrocious or something. You're going to know about it eventually, the fruits of it.

It could be a public declaration, it could be public preaching but the unseen is often helping people and that's what the deacons do. And we're not going to give you a long list of what they've been doing. I was a deacon once and I think Tripp was probably a deacon once and others.

It's a quiet job as it were and I think that's appropriate. Now the creation of deacons, the background here again in Act 6 is what every church wants, that kind of a background. There's so many people just multiplying left and right but with growth comes growth pains and the growth pain here is people fell through the cracks, in this case the widows.

They were skyrocketing church membership there as we know in Acts. Thousands joining and the growth pains come along. The problem is the widows were neglected by the Hebrews, the local Jews and God commands the church to help those kind of needy.

But what would the world think if this newly formed body of believers here in Acts did not take care of their own? That's why it was a problem that had to be dealt with and soon because the world is watching. Jesus told us that the world is watching and they need to see what? That you love one another and not just love the rich people and give them the best seats in the house as we read in James, right? They got the best place to sit. We're going to give them special treatment here.

No, a thousand times no. Who you give special treatment to is the poor and needy in your midst. There's different ways of doing this, that's what I'm going to talk about.

When they get to that list or level or qualification of 1 Timothy 5, the church puts them on an official list and takes care of them. Matthew 25 35. Matthew 25 35 we read Jesus explaining to them, for I was hungry and you gave me food.

I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you took me in. I was naked and you clothed me.

I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to me. And he's not just saying just the church officers as we'll see.

Assuredly I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren. He's describing who the least of these are. They are my brethren.

They are members of the household of God. You did it to me. And so they had to show here in Acts as we do today, kindness to your own people first and foremost.

And the solution for them of course was to have deacons. They ordained them. 1 Timothy 3 gives us qualifications of the deacon and the function as well.

There's a summary here of the function of deacon in our book of church government, the form of government we call it. Chapter 11 The scripture designates the office of deacon as distinct and perpetual in the church. Deacons are called to show forth the compassion of Christ and manifold ministry of mercy toward the saints and strangers on behalf of the church.

To this end they exercise in the fellowship of the church a recognized stewardship of care and of gifts for those in need or distress. This service is distinct from that of rule in the church. They're not ruling elders.

It's a very broad description of course of the function and authority of a deacon. It's a public authority, I'll remind you, using church monies, giving advice that should be taken very seriously because when you give money you give advice. You give control over it.

It's the church funds and you can't just run around and do whatever you want with it. This is temporary help. Often is what happens in the case of deacons unless again it's taking on a widow and they're not allowed to just run off with the money and do whatever they want.

It's supposed to deal with the needs before them. That requires authority and they would go tell the session they're not listening to me. This is a problem.

That's what I'm speaking of here and of course advice and warning. Use, a reminder again, use of public funds is different than using your own monies. You can do a lot of charitable things.

I'm not going to ask you what you're doing. That's between you and God. You and your family perhaps.

You and a couple of families together or whatever the case is. But public funds as you see here and as we know by common knowledge are different. We all have a cow when public funds of your local mayor are dipped into.

Now they have certain function. It's supposed to be done for certain things using the money and the public authority in the name of Christ. The deacons function in the name of our Lord and Savior as all the officers do although for their own particular responsibilities.

So one of the things of course that they are called to do is to help the needy. Specifically material needs, finances, home, car, food, even health matters, things of the body. Now remind us again, God is concerned with the soul.

Yes, that's why we preach the gospel. But in the church of God he's also concerned with the body and so he has the deacons here to assist in these matters. The widow list there in 1 Timothy 5 is not specific interestingly enough.

It just says put them on the number or the roll is the particular word there that it's a very specific idea. And I take it to be presumably for financial aid for something more or less permanent, not temporary. They're older, they've done good works, and now they can be put here and taken under the wing of the church.

Do not let a widow under 60 years old be taken into the number and not unless she has been the wife of one man and continues on with qualifications. And so what I'm basically saying is that list is specific for widows and other needy people, presumably children

without parents or something if they can't get adopted, maybe they need help. It's more or less permanent.

But if it's permanent, I think the lesser than permanent, temporary I mentioned, in ways and this is typically the case with deacons historically. They would help with some funds if it's a true emergency that you can't handle by your family and yourself and the like. But it's temporary.

We're not going to put you on a list. You're here, you're special, we're going to basically give you room and board for the rest of your life. And it's not a very long life if you're over 60 back then.

And you might not even be able to do that unfortunately because as you know most churches in America are under 100 people they're small and they don't have those kind of funds. It's harder today. It's a different world unfortunately but that's where we are.

It's a silent office as I pointed out before when helping the needy. They don't shout it from the rooftop and neither should you if you do it privately and on your own. Often done behind closed doors because it takes investigation.

You have to ask questions and look at finances sometimes if it gets bad enough. And they would coordinate with the session often explicitly although implicitly they're always under the authority of the session which is the gathering of the ruling elders and the pastor. And they do their work without accolade.

But as a church we know that helpers sometimes need helpers. Now what I want to say here as a side note is it's not always necessary to have a deacon. I know the language of the form of government said it's a perpetual office.

They just mean it's always available. It is an office. But your church may be so small you may not have enough families to have a deacon or even have a ruling elder sometimes unfortunately.

Which is not a good thing if you can avoid that. It's just the pastor. That's why in Presbyterianism you ask the Presbytery, the regional collection of churches for help.

Could you put somebody in the session with us? We like to have more than one guy make decisions for the body of Christ here. So these things do come upon us. That's true.

But nevertheless here what I want to highlight is helpers need helpers sometimes. And so this leads us to families and deacons. Families and deacons the third point.

Families and Deacons

So here we have not just the church organized but now the church organized intersecting with the church organic. The everyday life and interaction that we all have. Because the church organized does not micromanage your life.

At least they shouldn't. If they are they're probably a cult. We just don't.

We shouldn't. You have a lot of decisions that you know the details that we don't and you have to make a decision between you and God what to do with your funds, what to do with your time, what to do with your talents, what to do with your family. Or not do as the case may be.

But part of that doing and not doing as we'll see here is helping one another. This church organic is nothing formal. It does not have public authority or public funds.

That's why I say it's church organic in contrast to church organized. But we do have a lot of similarity in terms of helping one another. This is what we teach our children right? They should be little helpers to mom and dad.

Does that mean they have the authority of mom and dad? No. It means they're just assisting. They're helping and they're under their parents oversight of course.

And likewise here as well. James 1.27 we were reminded, pure and undefiled religion before God and the father is this, to visit orphans and widows in their trouble or in their time of need. It's a general admonition as the bulk of the book of James is to all believers.

It's not well deacons are supposed to visit the orphans and the widows or pastors are supposed to do it and the rest of us have no responsibility at all for these things. And some people approach the church life that way. It's the church organized that does everything.

The rest of us are on our own. We don't really care. That's not the right way of doing it.

Now not everyone's a deacon. Deacons do use church funds. You don't.

But you can still do something. You can simply just go to the hospital and read some Bible to them. You can give them your own money.

You can give them your own advice. I'm not going to stop you unless you're, I hear you give them very dangerous advice of course. But that's the general admonition of all of us.

If you catch someone in gross sin and lying and whatnot, you should confront them. You don't need a pastor to do that. And so these are all the general functions that we all have as believers.

Caring for one another is one of them. The book of Acts shows the members without public ordination. They're not called deacons.

No one pretends they're deacons. No one pretends they have access to public funds and public authority in the name of Christ. Acts 2.45. Now all who believed were together and had all things in common and sold their possessions and goods and divided them among all as anyone had need.

So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart. We read all who believed. It's the language here.

Were helping one another before chapter six, which was the deacons. We don't know how long that was. This is right at the beginning of the Pentecost church.

And so there are a lot of activities in this list that look like they could be just deacon activities that clearly weren't. They were the rest of us who aren't deacons. And it looks similar, of course, but differ with respect to public authority.

And so I argue, I don't think it's much of an argument, I don't think anybody really disagrees with this, that we should help deacons if possible, if it comes up, if we're available, and the like. I'm not saying this is a burden, like you typically hear, you gotta all be evangelists, you gotta be preaching to somebody all the time, you gotta be a deacon, you gotta be helping somebody all the time. No, no, it just may come up, you may have something that can be especially helpful in this circumstance if you know about it.

All duties are mutual is the basis of this. Parents need the help of the children insofar as the parents are supposed to, the children are supposed to submit, and submit joyfully, and to be an assistant to their parents when they give them a command, and not fight against it and resist it. And children, of course, need the help of the parents to do their duty as well.

Kids get frustrated if parents demand that they clean their rooms, but won't give them the cleaning equipment. Won't give them the time to do it. That's what I mean.

And church officers may need help with their duty. The way we did this a long time ago, and even up to several years ago, a moving party, comes a moving party, let's all get together. If you can, if you don't have the strength for it, if you're tired, if that's your weekend, I'm not going to judge you.

We shouldn't get into that kind of approach to things. I'm more holy than you, I've been to more moving parties than the rest of you have. No, a thousand times no.

But, as you are able, do good to all, especially the household of faith. And able is between you and God, and I know we have our limitations. So there's these kind of ways in which you can help church officers, and deacons in particular, as the moving parties, the gathering of food and the like, and resources and clothing, all dependent upon your time and ability and the like.

Or even inclination sometimes, because we don't really need, you know, 15 people for a small moving party. Maybe we just need five or six. So don't feel too guilty if you don't show up.

So there's other things you can do, of course. Honor them. Pray for deacons and the like, and to thank them.

The church is involved in the life of widows, brothers and sisters. That's what God has given us in his word here. Many verses, 16 verses, a large section here of chapter 5, talking about this very thing, being emphatic on what should be done or what should not be done in this regard.

And as a collection of families and individuals, the church can privately help, and has helped, and I know has done many good things in our church over the decades that I've been here. And as a public institution, there are limits upon that help, to be sure, as we read here. But such limits should not discourage us from doing our part, doing your part.

To help the needy, not just widows, the poor and the orphan, and those around us. And if possible, assist the deacons in matters that may require such help. But in all things, to follow the will of God and to love the saints.

And our Lord and Savior, we pray. Amen. Let us pray.

And so, Lord God Almighty, we ask that we would have a clear understanding of these responsibilities of the church, the family, and the deacons. And the relationship therein, and how we can assist, Lord, the church officers, and the deacons in particular, in various and sundry ways. Our God and Savior, you have continued to guide us and prosper us as a church here at Providence, Lord, with good funds.

We pray that we be wise with such funds. And so would the deacons here and in the future, Lord, and for all churches. And that we would live in a good harmony as the people of God, doing what we can a little here and there to take care of those in need near us, and those in need officially at the church of Jesus Christ.

Our Lord and Savior, we pray for more such opportunities so that we can show kindness and goodness. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.