

How to Support Our Deacons

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Date: 17 November 2014

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[0 : 00] Let's begin with a word of prayer.

Heavenly Father, this morning for us, prayer is not a habit, but is a recognition of our need. It is a recognition of your sufficiency.

It is a recognition of the fact that you who abide in heaven have your ear bent to hear the frail call of your children, that you delight in us because of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that as it says in Ephesians, you have blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Jesus Christ.

And this morning it is our prayer that you would work to take the word that you have blessed us with and strengthen our hearts that we would be a people that walk in humility and obedience and joy, trusting in your wisdom and your plan, and understanding that often the pleasure and satisfaction of obedience comes after we have acted by faith and obeyed.

And I ask for your Holy Spirit's help in my life and in those who hear the word this morning, that Christ, our Savior, would be magnified among us.

[1 : 50] Amen. Last week we looked at the passages of Scripture in particular that relate to the men who God calls in our fellowship to serve as deacons, and we recognize that God in His plan over time works to prepare men to be servants in the bride of Christ.

And one of the things that I want us to do this week, having looked last week at some of the qualifications, is I want to switch around, and this week I want us to think about the part that God's people play together in enabling and encouraging and strengthening those who serve the body of Christ as leadership.

I stop and recognize, as I think back over my own life, that so much of what I have received has come through, first of all, the Word of God and the Spirit of God in blessing me with salvation, but also the same is true for you who are here.

Most of you know Christ as your personal Savior, and much of the blessing that you have received has come because of that. At the same time, you have to recognize that much also that we enjoy comes through relationships with other people that are godly instruments and end up being encouragers and nurturers of godliness in our life, and we have been blessed richly by those that God has put into our lives for the sake of the gospel and for our progressive sanctification.

And so last week, thinking about the matter of the work of God in raising up godly leadership and the importance that we have in praying and thinking carefully about the role those men would serve in, I want us to think this morning in particular, how do we go about, as God's people, in helping and encouraging those that He raises up to be, servants of the bride of Christ and leaders in this fellowship.

[3 : 41] And if I were to summarize the sermon in three words, and so you can write this down on your paper, and don't check out because there's some things to be said at this point, but in essence, I'm interested in encouraging you to help your deacon.

Deacon. Help your deacon. Help your deacon. Help those that God puts in leadership. And so as we talk about the matter of how we go about doing that, I want you to recognize that you help by participation.

You help by participating in the work that God calls deacons and pastors to be engaged in directing the bride of Christ to act on. I want you to turn in your Bibles, if you would, at this point, to Acts chapter 6, verse 1.

Acts chapter 6, verse 1. We're going to look eventually at verse 3, but mark what it says. Now in these days, when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

And the 12 summoned the full members of the disciples and said, It is not right that we should give up preaching and the Word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, who we may appoint to this duty.

[5 : 01] As you look at the passage, one of the things that you understand is that what the apostles recognized is that the need of the church had to be met and there was a way to do it.

The statement that we find there in the text that we may appoint or we may put in charge of this task indicates that the men who were chosen to engage in this responsibility were not appointed exclusively to be the only ones who did the work that was needed in the ministry.

Now recognize, if you will, stop and kind of get your hands around this for a second, that by this point the early church probably numbered in excess of 4,000. And when you do a little bit of extrapolation from that, you can imagine that there were a number of widows in that fellowship that actually needed attention and care, and as a result there was a significant concern that the church had for that responsibility and it wasn't being met.

And we find that the apostles said, hey listen, it's appropriate for us to stay focused on that which God has called us to be engaged in, namely in prayer and the teaching of the Word of God, and we need individuals to meet this need as well.

And they gave the responsibility of doing this work to seven individuals who met the biblical standards that we find here in the passage. I want you to recognize as you think with me through this passage that the fact that the text speaks about these seven men being charged with the responsibility or the task of overseeing it indicates that they were expected to involve other people to do the job.

[6 : 40] And so when we pay attention to this this morning, I want us to understand that the underlying assumption was that deacons in the early church relied on others to help them do the work.

They didn't do it all by themselves. They involved other people in doing it. And an underlying supposition behind that is that people were willing to do the things that those who had been appointed to have oversight of those responsibilities saw that needed to be done.

Did the seven deacons that were appointed end up being the only ones who visited the widows or took food to them or cared for their needs? Not by any stretch of the imagination, but they were the ones who had the responsibility of overseeing that that task was cared for.

And that's the way it is today. I want you to understand that when you stop and think about what a body of believers do, I want you to pay attention to the fact that God has appointed godly leadership in this congregation and over the years.

That godly leadership has been, first of all, a testimony of the character and heart of Christ in their ministry and attitudes, and you have the opportunity of watching them.

[7 : 51] I know yesterday was a moving day for a number of families. We had actually two families move yesterday. And I don't know, how many of you were there to help with a move? Raise your hands. Look around.

Look around. Mark the fact that a number of you were involved in those moves. And I can venture to say that you had deacons on site, you had some pastors on site, you had individuals who were willing to serve and invest their energy in the sake of the body.

And as you think about that, you recognize that the deacons didn't do the only heavy lifting. They were involved in organizing and seeing that it got done and encouraging the bride of Christ in caring for that.

The greater part of work that is done in any healthy body is actually done by people who serve willingly and freely without coercion and pressure.

There never has been, nor will there ever be, any manipulative fashion in which people are called to the task. By the way, since you're a member, you are responsible to show up for four moves and to provide seven meals this next year.

[9 : 00] I'm getting hot. I don't know what that means, but anyway. Membership, membership doesn't work that way. We look for people that are willing to serve and we put the announcement out there and people rise to the occasion and get involved there.

So let's think a little bit about the different ways in which actually you help your deacon by participating. For one, many of the body of Christ help with the spiritual needs and attitudes that often you are aware of first before, people sometimes think pastors know everything.

They really don't. How many of you as parents remember that you were usually the last one to know what was happening in the basement? The same thing is true for pastors. We often don't find out and deacons also don't find out.

But eventually, it works up the food chain, correct? Early on, however, most of the things that are happening in the body of Christ are cared for by people who minister to one another in the flow of life.

I've said over and over again that a healthy body has a tendency of healing itself. Can I say that slowly so you understand my point? A healthy body has a tendency of healing itself.

[10:16] Being a man now who is many years into ministry and having gray hair, I have a number of pastors who call me periodically and ask me for advice. And I cannot tell you how many times I've answered a call where a pastor, a younger pastor, has been particularly alarmed by one problem or another and I've said to him, hey, listen, as a rule, a healthy body will do a lot of the work of taking care of some of the issues within.

You know, when one person says something that is inappropriate or off color, you don't send a note to the pastor and say, by the way, I heard this said in the lobby and I think you ought to take care of it.

How is that cared for? What you do is you wait for a private moment and you say to your brother, you know, I heard what you said and I just wanted to be sure I understood. What was the frame? By the way, how many of you would know a passage of scripture that would kind of reference that plan of attack? How many of you know Matthew chapter 18 which says, when you have a problem, what do you do?

Do you call somebody else to the task? No. If God providentially intended for you to hear it, he intends for you to solve it.

[11:32] And I want you to understand, as a general rule, a healthy body helps one another and brings a lot of healing to the family of God. I think, back for a moment in reference and illustration to something that happened, it's over 10 years ago.

Our fellowship used to have a Christian school here and when it came time, the school board and the church board voted unanimously to close the school. I remember that there was understandable turmoil and difficulty in the congregation over that fact.

Very interestingly enough, there was a small group of individuals who decided that what they would do is try to foment a rejection of that idea and cause some turmoil over it.

And I think there were about three or four different families in our fellowship who immediately after getting a call from this group of people, they immediately called their deacon.

I like that. They trusted their deacon to be one helping them work through problems. And I remember I had calls from three or four deacons who had had these calls from other families and I said, hey listen, I appreciate the fact that our people called their deacon first.

[12:56] And our deacons, wonderful, godly men, ended up helping work through that situation and never became an issue in our fellowship. Did it prove to be a time of testing and hardship?

Yes, but it was something that the body helped work out. And that's how the body helps those who are leaders. We help each other move. I saw that on Saturday and I've seen that over and over again over the years.

Men, women, families, I was talking with a neighbor of mine who actually was asking, so what is going on? And I said, well, we've got two different moves in our church. Really? We tend to not call two men in a truck.

What we do is we invite each other to moving parties, okay, and we end up helping with those things. And one of the things that usually happens is that we have enough people there to help with it that we end up standing around waiting at the truck for somebody to hand something off and we have the neighborhood crowd kind of watching this from a distance and we get one comment after another, wow, are these all family members?

No, no, but they are. And we work together for the glory of Christ. Furthermore, we help each other with meals. When someone has a surgery, when there's some hardship that really challenges a family construct, one of the things that you'll have happen is that a deacon, one of our small group leaders, will step in and provide for that.

[14:20] And I look out over this congregation and I cannot think of an individual that has not been involved either in having meals or in bringing meals to someone else when those hardship and difficulties happen.

Most of the counseling and comfort, correction, and care actually comes through the body of Christ and is encouraged and nurtured by our deacons and their ministry to you.

So when you think about how do you help a deacon, you help with participation. Be involved in what the body is doing because your deacons are dependent upon your participation. Secondly, be involved, help with affection and protection.

I want you to look in your Bibles at a passage in 1 Thessalonians 5. 1 Thessalonians 5, verse 12 and 13.

We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you and the Lord and admonish you.

[15:27] Hey, by the way, how many of you really do well at receiving correction? Wave at me so I know who you are. I don't see anybody. Okay. The reason I ask this is that my bride is in here this morning so I can tell on myself and you don't have to tell her what I said.

When Judith is hired by God to provide occasional admonition and it's needed regularly, my first reaction generally is, how many, can you identify with where I'm going now?

It's like tone of voice. How many of you play the tone of voice card? Ah, I'm glad. Tim, I feel your pain, right? I have learned this, that when my attitude is wrong, Judith never has the right tone of voice.

One of the advantages of having the Holy Spirit in my life is that I can't get away with it. Amen? I like when men say that's right because God's working and he often uses the bride that he hired for a lifetime to help us with those things.

Well, in 1 Thessalonians, we're looking at this issue and it says, we ask you brothers to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you.

[16:55] Do people need to be admonished? Do they need to be encouraged? Do they need to be corrected? You know, when that happens, I think it's important for us to have a respect for the individual that God has placed in office over you.

It's not an accident. He put them there. And by the way, so that you understand, when you say no to the hired instruments that God has appointed, guess what he will do?

He'll go get another one. And someone who is a little rougher around the edges than the first one you objected to. How many of you can bear testimony that that happens?

And as we grow in grace, we begin to say, Lord, I don't want to tempt you to reach for a bigger stick. I'll settle for the one you're using now. Look at verse 13.

And esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Value them in love. So those who serve you are to be appreciated.

[18:04] They're to be valued, respected. And so when you hear someone saying something that's kind of sarcastic and surly, something that is unkind and disrespectful to those who have been put into office and appointed by the Holy Spirit to serve the bride of Christ, you ought not be one who becomes partner with that attitude.

Am I right? If you do, you're being disobedient to the Lord Jesus who gave explicit command that we're looking at here. Furthermore, it says that those who serve you are to be deliberately loved.

Look at the passage. And esteem them very highly in love. What does love do in relationship to when there are misunderstandings? What does love do?

Everybody smile, look at me. I want to wave at you so you know I'm talking to you. Love thinks the best and hopes the best and believes the best and endures all things and works through problems. Right? Beloved, I want you to think about it with this. This is God's word spoken explicitly to the family of God and says, follow these instructions.

[19:21] I want you to go to another passage. We're in 1 Thessalonians so just go over to 1 Timothy 5, verse 19.

1 Timothy 5, verse 19. Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As we read this text, it's important for us to stop and realize that it was written to be applied in the church.

And while the church is an incredible group of people that have been saved by the grace of God, it's always also an environment in which people are still in the process of growing in grace and they end up having bumps and warts.

I had an interesting conversation last week with a man talking about his marriage and he said, well, I suppose the problems in our marriage are because of our backgrounds.

And I said, well, there is a sense in which that is entirely true and there is a sense in which it is not true at all. And he was talking about the fact that he'd grown up in this one kind of home and she'd grown up in this kind of home and as a result, they were at the point of coming apart.

[20 : 37] And I said, the truth of the matter is that marriage at its best is two sinners in a canoe. And it takes the work of the Holy Spirit to help them learn what it is to have a happy marriage so that you don't go sideways on this.

I want you to look in your Bible just for a moment to Malachi. Malachi. We're talking about marriage just for a moment and I want you to step over to Malachi chapter 2.

I'm sorry, is chapter 2, verse 15. Hey, is marriage easy?

And the answer is not on your life because it takes two sinners and brings them into inseparable proximity with one another. How many of you on occasion have wanted to have a little distance between you and other sinners?

How many of you have had people who've wanted to have a little distance between you and them?

Marriage at its best is a challenge and in the scripture we understand that marriage is supremely important to God.

[21 : 54] He cares a great deal about it and in order to help people in their marriages surprise, in the Old Testament he gave to the Old Testament saints a portion of the Holy Spirit.

Now I want you to think with me just for a moment. How did Samson do all the miraculous powerful things that he did? How did he do it? Does anybody know? Through the Holy Spirit.

How did the individuals who were involved in the exceptional work in building the tabernacle etc., how did they do it? Through the Holy Spirit. And we understand that the Lord Jesus particularly in his ministry the thing that that set him apart above all others was the fullness of the Holy Spirit and the fact that it stayed on him.

We understand how important marriage is to God because in the Old Testament it says there read it did he not make them one with a portion of the Spirit in their union?

God cared enough in the Old Testament for marriage that he gave a portion of the Spirit for people in relationship to him. And by the way in the New Testament does every believer have the Holy Spirit abiding in him to help us with this business of growing in grace and in our marriage right?

[23 : 18] So coming back around to the subject of 1 Timothy here it is saying listen you're together and the church is an environment in which people who are still in the process of working through challenges are in close proximity with one another and we are dependent upon the Word of God and the Spirit of God to help us as we live and grow and work through the issues and he gives us explicit instructions how to solve problems.

When you have a problem what it says there in 1 Timothy chapter 5 verse 19 is that you don't bring a charge in a formal way what is being said is to the church leadership hey don't entertain or accept one of these little scurrilous comments that's made in the lobby about one of the leadership of the fellowship without substantial evidence and people are willing to bear testimony.

We see here that God instructs the body that they are to protect their leadership by following God's problem solving plan. I want you to think just for a moment what was happening in this case evidently is that the church that Timothy was responsible for would have periodic incidences in which people in the congregation would carry on a little bit of a whispering campaign about someone who was in leadership not happy with someone who was involved in Sunday school or not happy with something that had happened in youth group or not happy with one of the decisions that the pastor and deacons had made together instead of coming and handling the thing in a proper fashion little whispers would go along and people would kind of get involved I can't believe that.

So let's figure out what God's plan is for solving problems in the congregation. Turn in your Bible to Matthew chapter 18. Would you like to reduce seriously would you like to reduce the workload of your pastors and deacons be unrelenting in your application of Matthew chapter 18 verse 15 through 18.

You will make all of our jobs profoundly simpler. How do you handle problems when there are differences?

[25 : 45] Can anybody tell me? How many of you know? Raise your hand. You got this down cold.

When there is a problem and there is a misunderstanding that is causing tension between you and another person, you are to go to that person explicitly alone.

Now you're not to gather a little group of people who support you and yeah, I've had the same problem. They're the most unreasonable person I've ever met so I hope I'm going to support you when you go to bell the cat.

That was a bad one. I'm going to support you when you go to let them know that they're a bad person. Off you go. What you do is you go privately.

Look at what it says. It says that you're to go alone. If that doesn't work, then you bring somebody else with you that they may be a partner in the process.

What is the end goal of every confrontation that believers have in the body of Christ? Does anybody know what it is? It is reconciliation and restoration.

[26 : 57] I have occasional incidences where something happens to a finger or a foot or something like that and it gets hurt. Bob, sheet metal cut, there they are.

And you know what? Bob Consul works on heating and air conditioning and so he understands sheet metal cuts. It happens all the time. And so when you get those little cuts, the body puts all its energy into healing that part, right?

And the rest of my body doesn't say, well that stupid hand, that's the last time I'm sending blood to that one. You know, I have been at this forever.

Same, same. Cut, cut, cut. Yeah. I'm done. So the next thing that happens is I'm walking around without a hand and it's like, hello, you're one-handed Tim, I hope not.

You know, the attitude that we have towards one another is we're aiming for reconciliation. You know what? One of the things that goes with being a shepherd for as many years as I have been here is I know that in the family of God there are times where you end up with little attitudes and disputes among one another and my plea before God is that the Holy Spirit would drive you to obedience in Matthew chapter 18.

[28 : 22] I assure you if God's people would be faithful in Matthew 18 it would be so seldom that you end up having problems that get larger than that and the body of Christ would be effective and efficient in its ministry.

ministry. I for the most part want to challenge you to take that passage and say hey listen we're not going to bring charges without the premise and the effort that goes into doing this and all God's people said consciously and deliberately say it with me amen.

That's what God wants. Finally let's talk about one other thing you may help in prayer. You may help in prayer. Turn in your Bible to Hebrews chapter 13 verse 18. Hebrews chapter 13 verse 18.

Obey pray for us I'm sorry pray for us for we are sure that we have a clear conscience desiring to act honorably in all things. We are about a month away from our annual election and by extension we are about two months away from the first deacons meeting.

and following the first deacons meeting one of the things that will happen is that our secretary will put together a prayer bulletin that is reflective of the requests the personal requests that all of your deacons are going to make.

[29 : 51] Can I tell you ahead of time some of the things that our deacons are going to ask you to pray for? They're going to ask you to pray that God would help them in their own personal lives and personal walk.

They're going to plead with you that you would remember to pray for them. There is not a man that does not come into that board with a humility and a certain amount of fearfulness knowing the responsibility of being a helper of the bride of Christ and they will come with humility saying Lord help me in my own devotional walk that I may be able to minister to other people.

Second thing that those men are going to say and I know that they're going to say it ahead of time. Now watch the deacons. We have a group that's going to say well if pastor said it I'm not going to do it so I'm going to throw them off but here's the deal. They're going to say it anyway.

They're going to say and help me in my ministry to my family. Help me in my ministry to my family. Help me be wise in my care for my wife and help me to be a genuine encourager of righteousness in my children.

They're going to ask that they would also have the enabling of the spirit of God because they have to multitask and spend one more plate than you do. They have their personal walk.

[31 : 02] They have their family needs. They have their responsibilities by which they pay their bills and then they have what? They have you. Do they take that willingly?

Yes they do. But how many of you understand what I mean by spending plates? Our deacons have to spend plates. They have to keep things in balance. And so they will desperately ask that you join them praying that they would have the ability to minister effectively with the things that are going on. So think with me as we look at this passage. First of all pray that their lives will be marked by a clear conscience. By a growing desire to walk uprightly before the Lord in an unbelieving world.

Pray for them because they carry the burden and heartache of other people. There is no doubt that one of the things that characterizes our fellowship is that often you will talk in a more personal way with your deacons, with your small group leaders than you will with your pastors.

And that's not because we're alienated and isolated from you but your deacons and small group leaders are closer to you in your watch care groups and in your small groups and as a result they're going to hear those things and they can't hear them and not be affected.

[32 : 20] Pray for them because people tend to judge motives and actions without adequate prayer and information. How many of you have been pretty persuaded you know exactly what's going on when you don't know anything?

You pray for your deacons. I think of the number of different times as a pastor I have had people say some rather surprising things about the decisions that your leadership have made.

And one of the things that I always chuckle at is when people say well pastor always gets his way. I told you last week that's the furthest from the truth. But the other thing I have heard people say is that you guys made a rather hasty decision.

If you have ever served as a deacon at Maranatha you know hasty decisions are not on the menu. I had one deacon's wife say you guys are so deliberate that you are like watching paint dry.

You know. So. Be careful. And pray for them. Finally pray for them because they desperately need his power to serve and bless and be a testimony of Christ.

[33 : 36] So let me bring this all together and have you think about it in practical terms. What we have looked at this morning is kind of the other side of the responsibility that scripture lays out.

For one it told us we saw last week that deacons are to be men who are qualified tested men who are full of the Holy Spirit and are ready to serve.

We saw that last week. So what's our part. What's your part. God calls you to support them by being involved in the work. So when your deacon or your small group leader calls you and said hey will you provide a meal and you have happened to have had three or four times that different people have stepped in and helped you.

Don't say not on your life. I'm in. I'll help. And when someone calls and says hey my the way so and so is going to be moving and they would appreciate if you I'll be there.

I'll help. When you hear someone is struggling with a problem and a burden you join in helping with that and you be a helper to your deacon those that God has put in a position of responsibility and leadership.

[34 : 40] So what's the outcome. What's the outcome when a body of believers works effectively for the testimony of Christ inside the family and really works at loving each other.

What happens. Here. Follow me. Here's what Jesus said. By this shall all those other people that don't know Jesus pay attention and kind of wonder what's the real deal.

because you will what. You'll love each other. Is love natural to us. What's the answer. No. It's the work of the Holy Spirit.

It's the work of people who are dependent upon the word of God. It's the work of people that are willing to engage in what God does in drawing us together.

And so I would plead with you this morning. Beloved there is an unbelieving world out there that is desperate for the Lord Jesus Christ. And the way in which we care and bless and love one another is a principal testimony of the power of grace in our fellowship and in our neighborhoods.

[35 : 56] And God's people hearing the word of God convicted by the spirit of God say in their hearts privately privately I hear what God wants and I am saying yes to the Holy Spirit.

Let's close in prayer. Amen.