

Caring for Widows (Acts 6)

Biblical Examples

Foundation

Bible passage : Acts 6.1-7

In the Old Testament God gave commands that the people of Israel should care for those who unable to care for themselves, in particular widows and orphans. By the time of Jesus this was still being done by the Jews and we likewise hear about the first followers of Jesus caring for widows. This is thought to have been because as many people came to faith in Jesus (both “Hebrews”, that is Jews, and “God-fearers”, non-Jews) were no longer being cared for by their families and communities because of their faith. The same sort of thing still happens in parts of the world today.

Later Christians followed that example. In our own country churches were at the forefront of caring for those in need, until more recent times when governments have made people pay taxes and used the money to pay people to help those in need.

Today many people volunteer to help in organisations which care for those in need. Many Christians, follow the example of those early believers, by getting involved in church and charity activities to serve those in need in our communities.

Deacons

The English word “Deacon” translates the Greek word “diakonia” meaning servant. Most churches today have deacons. Though their role varies from denomination to denomination.



Deacons being appointed in a modern Baptist church.

In coming units we will hear from people who are serving their local communities in the way that those first followers of Jesus did.

At first sight Acts chapter 6 might seem to have a rather negative view of service. We read that the Apostles did not want “to serve at tables (v2). But

they were being overwhelmed by the burden of caring for those in need and so being hindered in doing what Jesus sent them to do, to serve God, and others, by preaching the gospel. (See unit 8.)

But, the church prayed and appointed seven men to serve by looking after the care of widows. Although the word “deacon” (see box) is not known, that is what they became known as.

Later we find the Apostle Paul writing about deacons in some of his letters. What he wrote shows that it was not a lowly office, but to be honoured as they were serving, like Jesus and the Apostles. (See 1 Tim 3.8.)

“those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.” 1 Tim 3.8 ”



The early followers of Jesus appointed deacons who served in practical ways, including of those in need.