



2021 Weekly Devotions

Week of: Oct 25th - Oct 31st

Sermon: October 24th



October 25

1 Corinthians 12:12-13

Acts 6 describes a church that has problems. The issues that the early church faced were present because people are easily overlooked in a fellowship of literally thousands, but we would be unwise if we did not recognize the fact that the division was caused, at least partially, by the presence of diverse people within the flock. We must read between the lines a bit as we seek to understand the context of Acts 6 but as Luke teaches us that the Hellenistic Jews are claiming that the Hebraic Jews are receiving special treatment, it becomes apparent that there are cultural tensions present. Many scholars have posited that this division was the simple result of a language gap. The Hellenistic Jews spoke Greek and, therefore, struggled to communicate with the majority of the church which spoke Hebrew.

Whether the language gap was the issue or there was some other problem that separated the two groups is largely inconsequential. The reality is that melding different cultural traditions is difficult. Some in our world today would say that the best way forward for the church is to plant “homogenous” churches. This is a term that means “alike”. Some think that the best method for reaching the world is not to attempt to combine every person, from every nationality, into a specific church but to plant a church for each type of person. While this might avoid some of the issues, it also skews the Gospel truth which is the foundation of our life and ministry as a body.

In texts like 1 Corinthians 12, the Apostle Paul reminds us that in the Gospel there is no longer “Jew or Greek”. The idea here is that the Gospel obliterates the things that most commonly defined us before our conversion. Your race, ethnicity and citizenship on earth are some of the most foundational things to your identity. If someone were to ask you who you are, many would respond “I’m an American!” Others would point to the color of their skin or the language they speak as some of the most precious and defining aspects of their personhood and yet Paul is teaching us that the Gospel transcends those things.

As we meet together, in Christ, we do so as new creations. We’ve been transferred from the Kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of light. We’ve been given a new citizenship and a new family that is diverse but united. Our unity does not come from our language or our ethnicity but our union with Jesus through the Gospel. As a church, we reflect the power of His gospel to bring us together as we live in harmony and fellowship with those who we would otherwise have very little in common. In fact, our diversity is one of the great proofs of the Gospel as it shows the power of God and the identity of the global body in a specific location.

Unfortunately, the church has done a rather abysmal job of reflecting this diversity in the United States. It’s been stated many times that the most segregated hour of the week is Sunday morning at 11am. Whether that’s true or not is largely inconsequential, what is undeniable is that Christians have done a poor job of modeling the diversity that the Gospel produces. There are many factors that have contributed to our failure, but we should learn from the early church who pushed through the uncomfortable conversations in order to achieve unity and intimacy with those who were not like the majority, culturally speaking.

October 26

Matthew 10:42

The first point of our sermon on Sunday dealt with the goal of deacon ministry. We defined the role of the deacon as those who are appointed to ensure the physical needs of the church body are being met. Over the years, there have been some who question how important this type of ministry should be to the body of Christ. In fact, an ancient heresy called "Gnosticism" denied the need to minister to the physical needs of anyone! They claimed that ALL physical things are bad (think our bodies, the material world, etc.) and therefore the height of spirituality is to transcend our bodies.

I've never met a confessing Gnostic, but I have met many people who still think this way. It is easy in our world to over-spiritualize things, acting as if the ONLY concern we should have is eternity with Christ. This can seem very mature and even enlightened but the biblical testimony is clear that God has created us in our physical bodies and God desires for us to serve one another in meeting our physical needs.

Our text for today is one example of Jesus' emphasis on the importance of meeting physical needs as our Lord equates giving a cup of water to one who is in need with serving Him! Jesus desires for His followers to be aware of the real needs of those around them and to work to meet those when possible. Furthermore, He makes it clear that when those needs are met, it is akin to serving Him in any other manner!

I chose this passage today because I want you to understand that our deacon ministry is, in many ways, our attempt to work to obey this exhortation from Christ. What the deacons do when they cut grass, help people with their groceries, ensure folks can get to an appointment with a physician, take care of trees that fall during ice storms, and the like are all acts of Christian charity and love that are given as a direct result of the Lord's command to concern ourselves with the physical needs of others. Furthermore, as these men serve well, they constitute a great example and challenge to the rest of the flock to live in the same manner. Deacons are servant leaders, concerning themselves with the needs of the flock and demonstrating for us the way we, as Christians, can utilize our gifts and energies to bless others as well.

The early church was led to understand the value of the deacon ministry as they worked to ensure that the Hellenistic Jews were able to receive their daily bread. This was not something that would be nice for the church to help with, the task before the early church was a matter of biblical faithfulness! I thank God for faithful, loving, servant-hearted and diligent deacons. They are a real blessing to our church and their work is noticed by the Lord.

October 27

1 John 3:17

Yesterday we began to think some about the importance of being involved in meeting the physical needs of our fellow believer (and others also)! Today's text shows us that God is very serious about our taking part in meeting the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

I want you to notice how the Bible draws a straight line between our giving to our fellow believers and the state of our hearts. Helping meet needs is not an optional activity that could be helpful if we participate, helping meet the needs of our fellow Christian is an absolute indicator of whether or not the love of God resides in our hearts!

It is instructive to note the gravity of this kind of language. John is equating our willingness to be of service with the very state of our hearts as he quite literally says that the condition of our hearts is tied to our actions towards those who are in need. When the phrase "love of God" is utilized, it is employed in the immediate context of the Gospel. In fact, in verse 16, we read of Jesus' love for us which is the very definition of love as He laid down His life for us!

Those who truly believe, have seen the love of God in Christ and have embraced His sacrifice on our behalf but this cherishing truth also transforms our hearts to emulate our Savior. In light of the above truth, John is saying that we really understand the love of Christ and we demonstrate our faith and contemplation of what Christ has done through and by our action of meeting the needs of our brothers.

If a man or woman comes to us and states that they are a Christian, they are claiming that they believe in the sacrifice of Christ on their behalf. However, if they make such a claim and then turn around and deny the opportunity to show love to those in need, they betray their lack of understanding and embracing the love of God in Christ.

As verse 18 says, we do not show love in word alone, we show the love of God in deed. Those who are unwilling to demonstrate such love call into question whether or not they know and embrace the love of God in Christ.

Now, a few caveats. First, we are not saying that a person EARNs his or her salvation through their work of meeting needs. We are saying that a person DEMONSTRATES that he or she has been saved by the resulting service in their lives. Second, we are not saying that we must always succeed in this endeavor. Surely there will be times when we do not demonstrate the love of God in Christ to our brothers and sisters, but this does not mean that our selfishness or indifference should be normative for us. Instead, the general trajectory of our lives must be one of service and love to our fellow man which is one of the great pieces of evidence of a transformed heart that understands and embraces the Gospel of Christ.

October 28

1 Timothy 3:8-13

As the early church set aside the first batch of deacons, they did so underneath the direction of the Apostles. The leaders of the church set out qualifications for deacons which dealt with their character and spiritual maturity. Someone might ask why? Why did it matter that these men be full of wisdom and maturity?

The answer is that their task as servant leaders demands such things! We cannot ask someone to lead who does not have the spiritual maturity to make wise decisions and avoid the potential landmines that simply arise in a difficult and fallen world. Over the next three days, we are going to look at a more exhaustive list of deacon qualifications in hopes of understanding what these men need to be in order to qualify for spiritual, servant leadership.

The first thing we will mention today is found in verse 8 as the Bible says these men must not be greedy for dishonest gain. These men must be honest and not given to greed or under the table type operations. Why is this? There are at least two reasons that we will give.

The first reason is perhaps the most obvious, those who are prone to dishonest gain are operating in a worldly manner. They are men who are typically characterized by greed and even this fallen world looks down upon those who violate the rules for their own selfish desires. Additionally, such men risk the reputation of the flock as their association with the church, and specifically a potential position of leadership, is an indication of our endorsement of such nonsense and, therefore, we must be very careful not to allow such individuals into positions of influence and authority.

There is a second, related, reason for this qualification. The reality is that the position of leading efforts to meet physical needs often includes the handling of funds and resources. As the first church dealt with the division that was arising between the factions of Jews in their midst, they did so understanding that the solution would require a program whereby food and potentially capital would need to be organized and stewarded by the deacons. If these men were going to devise a ministry that would help the Hellenistic widows, they would need to oversee the purchase of supplies and the distribution of those supplies without the oversight of others in the congregation. This means that they were to be trusted, as a group, with the resources of the church.

This reality is still true today. Deacons are entrusted with the leadership of certain ministries and tasks that require them to be above board. They must be honorable and the kinds of men that the church would look to as trustworthy if they are going to lead well. If we are going to appoint a person to a position of influence, we must buttress ourselves against the potential for negative outcomes and therefore we must be sure to exclusively appoint godly men, who meet the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3, to such an important and honorable position.

October 29

1 Timothy 3:8-13

The second devotion in our passage from Timothy deals specifically with verse 10. Yesterday, we talked about the importance of having deacons who are not greedy and today we will talk about the importance of having deacons who are “tested”. This is the word that Paul employs in our verse for the day, and it is enormously important for us as a congregation.

There is some discrepancy as to what exactly Paul means by the phrase. Some have said that he is referring to an actual “trial period” of deacons before they are released as full-fledged members of the group. This is possible but I believe the real meaning behind the term is much less formal. As Paul says, it is important that people who are appointed to leadership are not novices in the faith, instead they have proven their ability to lead in the areas of their responsibilities by serving and showing their acumen and gifts prior to becoming a leader.

As Paul says they are tested, I believe he means that we should appoint deacons who are already “deaconing” (yes... I know that is not technically a word). What I mean is that we should appoint people to the position who have already demonstrated: a love for God’s people, an ability to organize an effort, a willingness to serve in the meeting of physical needs, a dedication to the church, a love of God’s Word and an ability to lead others in accomplishing the mission.

Folks, this might seem basic, but it needs to be stated, I meet many people who think they are given a position first, but this is simply not the case. The way the church should function is exactly opposite, we should be able to see your gifts, observe you serve and see your love and passion for a ministry before you lead it! You do not need the title of “deacon” or “teacher” in order to exercise your gifts in serving your neighbors or teaching your children/grandchildren/friends/family. Instead, you have been called of God to obedience and when you are obedient in the little things, God often exalts you to greater responsibility even as the church is blessed by your efforts.

When we are able to observe the quality of a person’s life and their ability to do the job, we are now in a position as a church to not have to guess whether or not a person is able and adept at what they’ve been called to accomplish, instead we simply affirm that a person has already demonstrated their ability and turn them loose to grow in their calling. I pray that all of you read this devotion as the challenge that it is! We need you to exercise your gifts (whether you will be a deacon or something else), we need you to be active in the body and we believe that as you are faithful, you will be used by God in majestic ways and ascend to positions of leadership for His glory and the good of His people at Smyrna Baptist Church.

October 30

1 Timothy 3:8-12

You know, the household is the ultimate proving ground for the man or woman of God. In fact, as Paul talks about the qualifications for a pastor in the passage immediately before ours, he asks this question: "if a man cannot manage his own household well, how will he manage the household of faith?" The point that the Apostle is making is that the household in which a person resides is a microcosm of God's household which is the church. If a pastor cannot lead his own wife and children, how in the world would we trust him to lead hundreds of other men, wives and children? The answer is obvious, he has proven in his own home that he is either qualified or unqualified through the vitality, or lack thereof, of those he is most immediately responsible for.

In the same way, the deacon is called to manage his home well. If a household is full of people who have their needs met. If a man's family loves the Lord, obviously loves their dad/husband, is well served and dedicated to the household of faith, there is real evidence that a deacon is present in the home! Conversely, if a man's home is in disarray, if his kids are nuts, if his wife is angry and bitter, if there are all kinds of needs arising that he cannot or will not meet, then we have reason to believe he is not qualified for the office.

I don't believe the above statements need much explanation. As we understand that a man is the spiritual leader of the home and as we reflect on the reality that a deacon is a servant leader of the household of God, the parallels become quite obvious. Nevertheless, I must admit that most churches have ignored this qualification. There does not seem to be much emphasis placed on the quality of a person's home as it relates to ministry. For some reason the church has decided that the home is a "judgment free zone" but this is a mistake.

While we should certainly lovingly and graciously work with those who are having problems and while the church should be a place of refuge for those struggling and a place of grace for those who have issues in the home, it does not follow that the church should turn a blind eye to the realities that spiritual leadership needs to improve before a person is appointed to another position of leadership within the church.

Church family, one of the greatest dangers in all of church life is wrapped up in the appointing the unqualified to positions of influence and authority. May we take the qualifications we have been given by the Spirit and through Paul to heart and may we hold our leaders to them! It is imperative that we structure our church so that we have men of great wisdom and discernment and maturity as deacons and a primary way we discern the level of competence they have in these areas is by observing their homes.

October 31

1 Kings 3:16-28

Today's passage hopefully helps to encapsulate and explain the reason for the necessity of wisdom in dealing with people's needs. As we read through our text in Acts 6, some might be tempted to ask why wisdom is needed at all. Isn't the issue as simple as serving meals to those who are in need? Why does it take someone with spiritual wisdom to oversee such a ministry?

The answer is that there are a myriad of potential risks and problems that arise when you are trying to serve fallen people. It takes wisdom to know how to steward resources. How would the men organize to gain the necessary capital to purchase the food or how would they solicit the congregation for help in groceries? Even more to the point, how would these deacons decide who is really in need?

That is a thorny question, but it must be answered! What if a widow arrives for her provision and she is a millionaire? Should she be given precious resource? If not, then what is the cutoff and how much is enough to disqualify a person from receiving daily provisions. You can see how this world provides all kinds of potential pitfalls for a man to discern if he is going to lead well in serving.

The simple truth is that this world is full of sin and, therefore, it is full of people who are not always the most transparent. We see this in our text today as Solomon is confronted with a truly unimaginable and horrific situation. As two women come before him both claiming that they are the parent of a little baby boy, Solomon must make a decision as to who to award the child to as the rightful mother. This is not an easy or inviable position to be in, yet the decision must be quickly made by the leader.

In our text, Solomon chooses wisely based on a brilliant and discerning technique which illuminated the rightful mother of the child. As such, he illustrates for us the necessity of wisdom in dealing with a fallen world. One woman stood before him as the rightful mother and the other as a liar! He needed to discern which was guilty of dishonesty and quickly. Now, I do not claim that deacons are confronted with situations that are quite so intense, but the principle applies. A godly and capable deacon must be able to understand and discern who is telling the truth and the true needs of an individual and/or family.

If an immature or foolish deacon is employed in a situation, they may be taken advantage of or lured into a harmful situation but if a man is truly wise and walking with the Lord, there is great reason to trust his Holy Spirit enabled discernment. While we may bemoan the realities of a fallen world, we also must live in light of them and prepare accordingly. Therefore, the necessity of a wise and discerning deacon body is a must for a faithful and vibrant church!