

Balancing Sensitivity and Stewardship in Diaconal Assistance

By the Deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Franklin Square, NY

Extracted from [*Ordained Servant*](#) vol. 7, no. 3 (July 1998), pp. 67.

As the Board of Deacons at the Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Franklin Square, New York, we have struggled for many years with the application of biblical truth to diaconal needs. We have felt the need to systematize a number of principles in order to avoid “shooting from the hip” in these ever increasing instances of financial assistance. Matthew Henry’s *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, in its exposition of 2 Kings 4:1-7, sheds a great deal of light on this topic. In this passage Elisha strikes a wonderful balance between sensitivity to the needs of the widow and the oil, while remaining a good steward of all that God has entrusted to him.

1. At the outset, our attitudes are of particular importance.

Widows and those truly in need are of special concern to those ministering in the name of Christ. Without a godly reputation, we cannot carry the consciences of our congregation members. God’s people rightly look to us with legitimate needs. Our response is to be willing to listen and desirous of understanding the people and their situations.

2. The next step is to apply overarching principles to the matter at hand.

Every effort is made to ascertain if the situation was precipitated by a sudden tragedy or by mismanagement. Was there an ongoing pattern of incurring excessive debt? Our obligation is to offer direction to the Lord’s people, in the way of personal industry.

- Are all gifts being used to their fullest extent?
- Has every attempt been made to satisfy creditors before going to outside help?

3. Now, we attempt to monitor that the actions flow from the principal foundation.

- Is the debt being reduced according to the plan?
- Is there a submissive and obedient spirit that is willing to heed counsel?
- The individual’s obligations must be undertaken and remedied by that individual and not discharged for him, by the Deacons. (God’s people will be greatly blessed in faithfully accomplishing these tasks which should, therefore, not be usurped by the deacons.)

4. Lastly, are necessary changes in attitude effected by this process?

- Is there contentment with little or an ongoing spirit of covetousness?
- Is there a growing conviction to fulfill obligations?

Formalizing these principles has enabled us to avoid being embarrassed about applying biblical principles to sensitive issues. God’s promises are sure and trust in him will never be disappointed. May God increase both our understanding of his truth and our willingness to implement it in our diaconal labors.
