

I Timothy 6:17-18 -- "instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share."

Hebrews 13:16 -- "And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

Galatians 6:10 -- "So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith."

Galatians 2:10 -- "They (James and Peter and John) only asked us to remember the poor -- the very thing I also was eager to do."

Note: Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260-c. 339), in his Ecclesiastical History (Book 6, Chapter 43) quotes a letter from Cornelius, bishop of the church of Rome, to Fabius, bishop of the church of Antioch. This letter, written about 250, mentions the organization of the church of Rome and the persons it supported.

Under the bishop there were 46 presbyters, 7 deacons and 7 subdeacons (the subdeacons were appointed because Rome was divided into 14 charity districts, which coincided with its 14 civil districts), 42 acolytes (assistants), and 52 exorcists, readers (those preparing for the office of presbyter), and janitors (those who took care of church property and admitted none but the baptized to certain parts of the service).

Cornelius states that more than 1,500 dependents (widows and poor persons) were supported by the church of Rome, which church may have included as many as 30,000 adherents. The number 1,500 represented 5% of the 30,000 adherents.

The questions which must be asked today include: "is there a continuing need for the office of deacon? Are there widows in our churches who are destitute (either because they have no remaining family or because their family refuses to support them) and totally dependent on God? Are there poor persons in our churches who are poor, not because they refuse to work, but because they can't earn enough to live, are chronically ill or handicapped, or simply can't find work, whose income is insufficient for their basic needs? Do Christian churches have any responsibility toward such persons, in terms of assistance or support? If persons in our churches who live on the borderline of poverty become infirm or invalid, do our churches have any responsibility to care for them? Or should we leave this responsibility (if we have one) to the civil government? If the needs of such persons are not covered by social security, medicare, welfare assistance, workmen's compensation, or meager pensions or annuities, should the church help make up or provide the difference in basic costs of living? And if the church has a responsibility in this area, should the deacons oversee it in an organized manner?"