

Deacons

The Right Hand of Ministry

Acts 6:1-7

Introduction

ILLUS: Right hand man illustration

When you study the book of Acts, one of the easiest ways to outline it is based on Acts 1:8

Acts 1:8 (NKJV) — 8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Chapters 1-5 deal with the church’s witness in Jerusalem

Chapters 6-12 address the church’s witness in Judea and Samaria

Chapters 13-28 show the church’s witness to the ends of the earth

“This is more than a story of the geographical spread of Christianity. It is much more the story of the gospel becoming a truly universal gospel, breaking the racial, national, and religious barriers.” (Polhill, 176)

When we pick up in chapter 6, we arrive at a major transition for the church. We are confronted with the fact that the church’s witness in Jerusalem had resulted in

growth that revealed one of the barriers that had to be addressed.

Deacons are to Help Meet the Needs of a Growing Ministry (1)

The term disciples here is does not refer to “The Twelve” – they will be delineated in verse 2 – it refers to the fact that members were being added to the church. This distinction will become more important as we move through the passage.

While it is certainly a goal for the church to grow as people come to faith in Jesus, it is also certain that growth in the church also brings with it challenges.

“Christians, someone once said, become very unchristian when they get organized.” (MacArthur, 176)

This is in fact true when the church is treated as a cultural institution rather than a spiritual organism. Yet, with an organism, as with the church, both growth and organization are necessary for life.

But with growth comes growing pains.

“Biblical church organization always responds to needs and what the Spirit is already doing ... Organization is never an end in itself but only a means to facilitate what the Lord is doing in His church.” (MacArthur, 176-177)

The specific challenge noted in this passage is one between the Hebrews (Aramaic speaking native Palestinian Jews) and the Hellenists (Greek speaking Jews from outside of Palestine)

The Distribution: A Jewish temple custom that cared for the needy and less fortunate.

Quppah (Basket) – weekly distribution for needy residents given out on Friday's with enough money for 14 meals.

Tamhuy (Tray) – a daily distribution for nonresidents and transients that included food and drink.

“The Christian practice seems to have embraced elements of both Jewish systems. Like the tamhuy it was daily, and like the quppah it was for the resident membership.”
(Polhill, 180)

The truth is that while the enemy cannot stop the power of God in growing His church, he can cause problems in the people of God that affects the growth of the church.

“Satan's goal was to divide the membership and discourage the leadership.” (Phillips)

Deacons are to Demonstrate the Character God Desires in Leadership (2-3)

In order to fight the spiritual battle the enemy was waging and minister to the needs of the growing church, “The Twelve” – that is the 12 Disciples – called the “multitude of the disciples” – that is the church – together to present a plan.

The fact is that The Twelve (or leadership of the church) had the authority to carry out the plan to address the issue and appoint people to service ...

“They wisely chose to involve the whole church ... So here we have the first hint of that happy blending of apostolic authority and congregational activity working towards a united decision.” (Phillips, 116)

Here was the proposal:

The Reason for the Proposal: “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.”

The term “desirable” means “to be pleasing.” It is in the singular form indicating they were not referring to what the disciples desired but what was pleasing to God.

“It was not a question of position but priorities.”
(Phillips, 116)

ILLUS: Shannon getting on to me about my priorities

The Resolution of the Proposal: The members were to seek out (to look among themselves, choose, and present those chosen) those to serve in this capacity.

“They (the Twelve) left the final approval of the plan and selection ... to congregational decision.” (Polhill, 181)

Here were the Prerequisites:

Good Men:

Men who had the love and respect of the people for how they were already walking with God and serving His people.

Godly Men:

Filled with the Holy Spirit – saved, sensitive to the things of God, and walk in the Spirit

Gifted Men:

Wisdom

“They must have biblical and theological knowledge, and the practical wisdom to apply biblical truth to the situations of everyday life.” (MacArthur, 182)

While there is some debate of whether this was the official beginning of the office of deacon in the church, it was certainly foundational to it. Paul would go on to give the specific qualifications of those who would serve as deacons.

1 Timothy 3:8–13 (NKJV) — 8 Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, **9** holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. **10** But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. **11** Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. **12** Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. **13** For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Reverent

Worthy of respect and honor (term used in Philippians 4:8 – honorable)

Unable to be justly accused and convicted of sin

One of whom people admire because of their godly qualities

Not double-tongued

Lover of the truth, Not deceitful or hypocritical

One who is trustworthy and free from deception

One who is not afraid to stand on the truth and who is not fearful of human disapproval

Not given to much wine

Carries the idea of being controlled by wine (or any other thing outside of the Holy Spirit).

Ephesians 5:18 (NKJV) — 18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit

In order to insure one is not controlled with wine, to avoid the appearance of evil (1 Thess 5:22), and in order not to cause anyone to stumble (1 Cor 8:13), we maintain that one seeking the office of a deacon must completely abstain from alcohol (or any other addictive substance such as tobacco and illegal drugs).

If abstinence is good for leaders of nations, surely it is good for the leaders in the church (Proverbs 31:4-5).

Not greedy for money

In context this means any man who obtains money in a dishonest or shameful way is unqualified to be a deacon.

It also disqualifies anyone for whom obtaining money is a higher priority than their relationship with the Lord, loyalty to the church, and service in leadership.

Holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience

The mystery of the faith is the sum total of the beliefs concerning God's plan of redemption that were once concealed now revealed through Jesus Christ in Scripture.

In short, this means one qualified for the office of a deacon must unashamedly believe that the Bible is the infallible and inerrant Word of God.

Not only to believe but to believe with a pure conscience meaning that it is not just lip service but a belief that has been both experienced and studied. Experienced in saving faith and studied in sanctifying faith.

A deacon must be a mature believer in Jesus Christ

Tested

This means not a novice or new believer. The test is not specified but it implies the test of life.

One must be observed in life as to character, integrity, sincerity, and maturity before being able to serve as a deacon.

Blameless

Blameless does not mean sinless but it does mean sinless. No one should be able to lay a charge against the man and make it stick.

It is to be repentant before God and above reproach before man.

Wives: some translations will have this term as women (which is entirely possible because, depending on the context, the term can be translated “wife” or “woman) but the next verse determines the context where it is certain it is not “woman”

Reverent

See reverent above

Not slanderers

Not a gossip or one who seeks to tear other down

Temperate

Self-controlled, reasonable, prudent, stable, discerning

Not a novice as well

Faithful in all things

Faithful to Christ, the church, her husband, her family, her ministry

Husbands of one wife

This does not mean one must be married (The same qualification applies for elder of which Paul and Jesus were one but neither were married).

It does mean that a person must not have multiple wives (polygamy) or have more than one wife in God's sight, and excludes anyone who has been divorced.

Ruling their children and own houses well

A deacon must be the spiritual leader in his home

He must fulfill the biblical call for husbands in Ephesians 5 and fathers in Ephesians 6.

His house must be in order otherwise he would not be capable of serving the church.

Boldness in the Faith

Deacons are to Protect the Priorities of the Pastors (4)

The priorities of pastors is Prayer and Ministry (diakonia – deacons) of the Word.

This does not mean that one is more important than the other. Actually, the fact there were people qualified,

available, and willing spoke to the validity of the pastoral ministry.

Ephesians 4:12 (NKJV) — 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

It just means that God calls people to different areas of service that have different priorities.

Deacons are to Represent the Members of the Church (5-6)

It is noteworthy that each of those chosen had Greek names, meaning all of those chosen were likely Hellenists.

And of these the first was Stephen – the first martyr of the church.

The second was Phillip – the first missionary/evangelist of the church.

History tells us little to nothing of the remainder of those chosen going to show that much of God's work is carried out by largely unknown but faithful people who are being used by God to impact eternity.

The church gathered around these men for their approval and prayer to God.

Deacons are to Enable the Growth of God's Kingdom (7)

This wasn't just any growth, but exponential growth (greatly multiplied)

So much so, that even many of the Jewish priests came to faith through the ministry of the church. This likely came first from the witness of the deacons in the distribution.

Conclusion