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Deacons / Deacons / Acts 6:1–7

Notes

03/01 Acts 6:1-7, "The Purpose of Peace," Subtitle: Protecting the Ministry of the Word, Scripture: Psalm 133:1-3; Exodus 18:21-33 The Big Idea: Deacons exist to protect the unity of the church and the priority of the Word. Key Concept: When physical needs cause relational friction, the Gospel's progress is at risk. Deacons are the "shock absorbers" that keep the church moving forward.

Guardians of the Word

Subtitle: *Shielding the Church's Source of Life*

Scripture: Acts 6:1-7; Psalm 133:1-3; Exodus 18:17-23

INTRODUCTION

The early church didn't almost die in its infancy from Roman lions or Pharisee prisons; it almost died from an internal culture war. In Acts chapter 6, the church is exploding with growth, but beneath the surface, a dangerous fracture is forming between two groups: the "Hebrews" and the "Hellenists."

This wasn't just a language barrier; it was a deeply ingrained, centuries-old prejudice. The Hebrews were Aramaic-speaking, orthodox Jews who secretly looked down on the Hellenists—Greek-speaking Jews from the broader Roman Empire—as worldly and compromised. So, when the Hellenist widows were continually left out of the daily food distribution, they didn't think it was an administrative typo. To them, it felt like deliberate, systemic prejudice. The enemy was using the oldest trick in the book: turning a logistical failure into a cultural offense.

The Apostles found themselves caught in a lethal trap. If they drop the preaching of the Gospel to manage the food lines, the church will spiritually starve. But if they ignore the hurting widows to stay in their studies, the church will socially fracture.

Their solution changed the course of Christian history. They didn't compromise the mission, and they didn't ignore the vulnerable. They called for a new kind of leader: Guardians. Now, a careful reader of the Greek text will notice that the official title "Deacon" isn't actually used here in Acts 6; that formal office comes later in 1 Timothy 3. But make no mistake—what we are looking at today is the DNA of the Deacon. Acts 6 is the blueprint. They called for men of character who would step into the chaos, heal the neglected, and protect the lifeblood of the church.

The Big Idea:

The Ministry of the Word is the lifeblood of the Church; Deacons are the guardians of it.

I. Neglecting the Word Starves the Church, but Overlooking the Vulnerable Fractures It (Acts 6:1-4)

A. Unmet Physical Needs Are a Spiritual Crisis (Acts 6:1)

- The text says the Hellenist widows were being "neglected." The Greek word here is *paratheōrounto*, which literally means to "look past" or have a cultural blind spot.
- The Hebrew Christians likely weren't maliciously starving the Greek widows; they were simply looking right through them. But this kind of oversight wasn't an administrative typo; it was a crisis of care that threatened to split the early church along cultural lines.
- Today, the "vulnerable" aren't just the widows of the first century. They are the marginalized, the trafficked, and the exploited workers who so easily slip through the cracks of society.
- If the church ignores the hurting, our witness fractures.

B. The Ministry of the Word Cannot Be Sacrificed on the Altar of the Urgent (Acts 6:2)

- The Apostles recognized the danger of a shifting priority: *"It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables."*
- Think about the winter of 1777 at Valley Forge. The Continental Army wasn't just struggling with the cold; they were starving and on the verge of mutiny due to a total collapse of logistics. George Washington knew he couldn't lead the army into battle if the men were dying of neglect in the camp. So, he turned to his best combat general, Nathanael Greene, and begged him to take over the dreaded role of Quartermaster General. Greene hated the idea—he wanted the glory of the battlefield—but he took the job, fixed the supply lines, and saved the army.
- In Acts 6, the Apostles are facing a Valley Forge moment. The church is starving and

fracturing from the inside. They knew they couldn't fight the spiritual war on the front lines if the supply lines of compassion were broken.

- Serving tables didn't carry the visible glory of preaching, but without Guardians securing the supply lines, the mission would fail.
- The ultimate trap of ministry is that a truly good and necessary thing (feeding the hungry) can become the enemy of the essential thing (feeding the soul).
- If the leaders fall into this trap, the church starves.

C. The Church Must Not Compromise; It Must Multiply (Acts 6:3-4)

- The Apostles refused to choose between providing physical care and declaring spiritual truth.
- Instead of abandoning the Word or ignoring the widows, they multiplied their leadership.
- They called for men full of the Spirit and wisdom to step into the gap.
- They were proving that when the church faces a crisis of capacity, the answer is never to compromise the mission—the answer is to multiply the ministers.

D. A Bottleneck in Leadership Stalls the Flow of Fellowship (Exodus 18:13-26)

- This is the exact lesson Jethro taught Moses.
- Moses tried to be the single lane for every problem, dispute, and need in the camp.
- Jethro warned him, "You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out."
- When ministry is bottlenecked by a single leader, the traffic of care backs up, the vulnerable are left stranded on the shoulder, and the fellowship stalls out.
- The Apostles avoided this traffic jam in Acts 6 by empowering Guardians immediately to keep the church moving forward. This was a proven concept from Israel's history, to avoid the destructive nature of the urgent over the important.

II. The Dividing Noise of Need Drowns Out the Voice of the Word

Frankly, this noise is not meant to be an obstruction, it is meant to be a catalyst. God is in the business of healing and the noise of need is provided as the very catalyst through which God provides that healing. However, if our only desire is the avoid rather than to heal, then such moments of need become distractions for our plans,

rather than that which furthers God's plans.

A. Legitimate Complaints Can Become Lethal Distractions (Acts 6:1)

- The text says a "complaint" arose.
- The Greek word used here is *gongysmos*. This wasn't a polite suggestion dropped in a comment box; it was a low, muttered, subversive grumbling. It is the exact same word the Greek Old Testament uses for the Israelites grumbling against Moses in the wilderness.
- The Apostles heard this *gongysmos* and recognized the threat immediately: this was the noise of a wilderness-level rebellion that could destroy the camp.
- The Hellenists had a real grievance, but the *grumbling* was the true threat.
- The enemy doesn't always attack the church with false doctrine; often, he just turns up the volume on our internal disputes so that the world can't hear the Gospel over our shouting.

B. Deacon Care is the Oil that Re-Consecrates and Unifies a Distracted Church (Psalm 133:1-3)

- In Psalm 133, the sacred oil running down Aaron's beard was an act of consecration—it set the priesthood apart for God's holy work.
- When the early church fell into murmuring, they didn't just become divided; they became *distracted* from that holy calling.
- The Guardians stepping in to care for the widows is the beautiful picture of that anointing oil.
- Their practical, attentive care was a re-consecrating act. It pulled the church's focus back to its core purpose, and in doing so, it re-established the very unity the enemy tried to steal.

C. Guardians' Silence the Chaos as they Heal the Neglected (Acts 6:3)

- The Apostles didn't just need administrators; they needed healers.
- Guardians do not silence the noise of a church by simply telling people to stop complaining; they silence the noise by stepping into the messy chaos and addressing the root of the pain.
- By applying the "oil" of practical care to the overlooked widows, these men healed

the hurt that was causing the murmuring.

- It is this intentional, compassionate healing that ultimately restores the peace of the church, freeing the entire body to refocus its attention back on its primary purpose: the Ministry of the Word.

III. The Character of the Guardians Brings Healing in Support of the Word (Acts 6:3-6)

A. "Good Repute" Rebuilds the Bridge of Trust (Acts 6:3)

- When a segment of the church feels overlooked, suspicion and hurt take root.
- The Apostles knew you couldn't send just anyone to fix this; you had to send men of "good repute"—men of unquestionable integrity.
- When hurting people see a leader with a good reputation walk into their mess, their walls come down.
- The Guardian's integrity is the very thing that rebuilds the congregation's trust and brings healing.
- That healing stops the murmuring in its tracks so the Word can be heard again by everyone.

B. "Spirit and Wisdom" Neutralize Relational Friction (Acts 6:3)

- Fixing a food shortage takes logistics, but healing the *needs and feelings* of neglect takes the Holy Spirit.
- The Apostles required men "full of the Spirit and of wisdom" because navigating a cultural conflict is a spiritual battlefield.
- It takes divine wisdom to listen to complaints without getting defensive, and it takes the Holy Spirit to minister with supernatural patience.
- Their spiritual maturity—not their administrative prowess—is the "shock absorber" that actually neutralizes the friction and shields the ministry from the hurt.

C. Humble Representation Disarms Conflict (Acts 6:5-6)

- Remember how this was a culture war between the Hebrews and the Hellenists?
- Look at the seven men the congregation chose: Stephen, Philip, Prochorus... all seven of them have *Greek* names.
- When Abraham Lincoln was elected President in 1860, the nation was fracturing. To

hold the union together, Lincoln did something completely unprecedented: he built his cabinet out of his fiercest political rivals.

- Lincoln knew he needed their trust to heal the divide.
- Centuries before Lincoln's "Team of Rivals," the Hebrew majority in Acts 6 did the exact same thing.
- They didn't form a "bipartisan committee" to protect their own interests.
- They handed 100% of the administration over to the offended minority! They handed the keys to the very people who had been complaining.
- By intentionally empowering the wounded party, the church acted in profound humility.
- And notice the commissioning in verse 6. The Apostles laid hands on them, publically giving recognition of this team as a sacred role or calling.
- In the Greek text, the word for the "daily distribution" in verse 1 and the "ministry of the word" in verse 4 is the exact same root word: *diakonia*.
- There is no secular vs. sacred work here.
- The Pastor's *diakonia* is the Word; the Deacon's *diakonia* is the vulnerable.
- The Apostles didn't surrender the spiritual oversight; they surrendered the execution of the care to these elite servant-leaders.

IV. A Guarded Word is a Growing Word (Acts 7)

A. The Unhindered Word Inevitably Multiplies (Acts 6:7a)

- The text begins the climax with a beautiful phrase: "*And the word of God continued to increase.*"
- When the Apostles were freed from the bottleneck of administration, and the noise of division was silenced, the Gospel didn't just survive the crisis; it exploded. And that explosion didn't stop in Jerusalem.
- By empowering these Hellenist Guardians to solve a cultural conflict *inside* the church, God was secretly training the exact men who would soon cross enemy lines *outside* the church.
- Just two chapters later, it is Philip—one of these very men who started out serving tables—who breaks the ultimate cultural barrier and carries the Gospel to the

despised Samaritans!

- Philip is the one who sends the Gospel message back to Ethiopia (Acts 8:26–40)
- A guarded pulpit is a powerful pulpit, and when the Word is unhindered by internal friction, it always multiplies.

B. A Healthy, Unified Church is an Irresistible Witness (Acts 6:7b)

- The result of that increasing Word was that *"the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem."*
- The great theologian Francis Schaeffer used to say that the "final apologetic"—the ultimate, undeniable **proof** that the Gospel is true to a watching world—is the way Christians love each other.
- The watching city of Jerusalem in Acts 6 didn't just hear a sermon; they saw the final apologetic. They saw Hebrew believers giving up their power to feed Greek widows.
- That beautiful combination of practical mercy and unapologetic truth became an irresistible magnet to the city.

C. The Gospel Penetrates the Hardest of Hearts (Acts 6:7c)

- Luke slips in one final, stunning detail: *"A great many of the priests became obedient to the faith."*
- This is the ultimate victory. These were the Jewish priests—the very establishment that had opposed Jesus and threatened the Apostles.
- God's hand is seen all through this narrative, demonstrating that the Gospel is as important and powerful in the lives of the Hellenists as it is to the Pharisees.

Romans 1:16 NASB95

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to **everyone** who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

CONCLUSION

- Why did those Jewish priests suddenly surrender to Jesus in verse 7?
- Historically, we know that the first-century Temple system was caught up in its own culture war. The aristocratic high priests—the Sadducees—controlled the Temple. They hoarded the wealth and the tithes, leaving thousands of ordinary, working-class priests (who often aligned with the strict Pharisees) living in abject poverty. Some of these lower priests were literally starving.

- These starving priests looked at the Temple and saw a broken system: the Sadducee leaders were using their power to exploit their own people while getting rich. **But then... they looked across the street (Solomon's Portico) at the Church.**
- They saw a community that had every excuse to split, but instead, they watched the Hebrew majority lay down their power to ensure that a few Greek widows had bread.
- They saw a church striving so that no one was exploited or looked past.
- They saw a better kingdom, one that Jesus Himself described in what we call the Beatitudes in Matt. 6 and following.

The Temple was broken, but the Church was whole.

This is our calling today. When the world looks at us, they should see Guardians of the Word. They should see a people who aggressively love our most vulnerable, who fiercely guard our unity against the noise of division, and who refuse to compromise the preaching of the Gospel.

The Big Idea:

The Ministry of the Word is the lifeblood of the Church; Deacons are the guardians of it.

When the Word is guarded, and the hurting are healed, the Gospel becomes absolutely irresistible.