

New Testament Deacons Acts 6:1-7

Now in those days, when *the number of* the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. ² Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. ³ Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; ⁴ but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

⁵ And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, ⁶ whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

⁷ Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

Introduction

The greatest in the kingdom are the servants

Matt 23:11

¹¹ But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. ¹² And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Matt 20:26

but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. ²⁷ And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

I Cor 9:19

¹⁹ For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more;

Phil 2:5-11

⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross.

John 13:1

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.

² And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's *son*, to betray Him, ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, ⁴ rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. ⁵ After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe *them* with the towel with

which He was girded. ⁶ Then He came to Simon Peter. And *Peter* said to Him, “Lord, are You washing my feet?”

⁷ Jesus answered and said to him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.”

⁸ Peter said to Him, “You shall never wash my feet!”

Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.”

⁹ Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, not my feet only, but also *my* hands and *my* head!”

¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “He who is bathed needs only to wash *his* feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.” ¹¹ For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, “You are not all clean.”

¹² So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³ You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for *so* I am. ¹⁴ If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

I. The Clarification

Deacons are not elders, and elders are not deacons. Elders may have been deacons in the past but they are 2 separate offices in the church

Many churches, particularly Southern Baptist have unnecessarily blurred the distinction between elders and deacons, often making deacons act as elders in the church.

Phil 1:1

Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

I Tim 3

We have mentioned first the office of Bishop/Elder/Pastor then we have mentioned the office of Deacon in verse 8 clearly a distinction

Simply put, Deacons are servants, and Biblically have been given the task of the physical necessities of the church.

Deacons do not carry authority in the church, except that which the church and or elders have deemed it necessary to carry out the ministry.

II. The Concern

Acts 6:1

Now in those days, when *the number of* the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.

² Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.

⁴ but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

A. **The Problem Of Multiplication** – The Spirit had stopped adding to the church, **Acts 2:47**, and He had started multiplying. 3,000 men had been saved at Pentecost; another 5,000 men had been saved shortly thereafter. Add to this their wives, children and other family, and you can see that the church growing by leaps and bounds. It is estimated that the church in Jerusalem numbered between 20,000 and 50,000 at this time. (Ill. As a church grows larger so does its potential for problems. As a church grows larger so does its need for strong, godly leadership.)

B. **The Problem Of Murmuring** – There were two classes of people in the early church. There were the Aramaic speaking Jews who were native to Israel, and there were the Greek speaking, Hellenistic Jews that had come back from various parts of the world. The Hellenists were Jews that lived in Greek speaking countries. They were loyal Jews, but they had absorbed some of the Greek culture where they lived. They were different from their native Jewish brothers and there was a little friction between them.

Hellenist

This was not a dissention between races as many have inferred. It was not a case of Greek set against Hebrew; both groups were Hebrews. Those who complained were Grecian Jews or Hellenists. The Hellenists were Jews who were reared in a country where the Greek language was spoken and who had learned to speak Greek. They held to the Hebrew religion and were really Hebrews. Those within Palestine, particularly in Jerusalem, spoke Hebrew or Aramaic and held more closely to the Hebrew customs and traditions. The antagonism between these two parties had arisen during the days of the Maccabees.

The Bible tells us that they were “*murmuring*”. This word refers to “*secret debate; whispering*”. People were talking about others in a negative manner behind their backs. That is always a problem!

Satan had already attacked the young church in two ways. He tried persecution, **Acts 4:1-31; 5:17-41**; and he had tried introducing sin into the church, **Acts 5:1-11**. Both attacks failed and only caused the church to grow faster. Now, he tries a new tactic. If he cannot defeat the church from without, he will attack it from within! If he can divide the people, he will be able to cripple the church!

The same is still true today! If the devil cannot infiltrate us and attack us from without, you can rest assured that he will try to do it from within. He will do everything he can to divide us and cause us to attack one another. There is no place for anger, unforgiveness, division and trouble in the church! That kind of thing is deadly to a congregation, **Matt. 12:25**. What the church needs to thrive is unity, **Phil. 1:27; 1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 2:1-4; Eph. 4:31-32**. If there are divisive people in the church that refuse to walk in unity with the brethren, here is the Lord’s counsel regarding them, **Rom. 16:17; Phil. 3:17**.

C. **The Problem Of Ministry** – The Greek speaking widows were not getting their share of the daily food supply. The early church was committed to meeting the needs of its members.

In those days the people sold their goods and pooled their resources to see that every member had what they needed, **Acts 2:44-45**. Some of the more affluent people in the church, like Barnabas, sold houses and lands and gave the money to meet the needs of others, **Acts 4:34-37**.

Evidently, the Apostles were responsible for seeing to it that the people, but especially the widows, had the food and essentials they needed to live. As the church grew, the task became too large for the Apostles and some people were inevitably missed in the daily food allotments.

The Greek speaking element of the church apparently felt like this oversight was deliberate and they spoke up about it. The problem was this: there was too much to do and not enough hours to do it in. As a result, some things were left undone and it caused problems in the church.

(Note: The church still faces the problem of ministry. In our day the sole burden for ministry in the church, in most cases, has been placed on the shoulders of the Pastor. In a small church this is a barely possible task. If everything is left up to the Pastor, some people are going to be neglected and they are going to be offended. Problems will come and the church will suffer..)

III. The Call

³ Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; ⁴ but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and

Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, ⁶ whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

Out of Necessity , the call was made for men to be selected and appointed over the physical matters of the church so that the Elders could give there attention to the spiritual matters. Prayer and the Word.

IV.The Character

They Were To Be Good Men – “*of honest report*” – This phrase refers to men who “*have experienced something.*” It speaks of men who by their testimony and lifestyle have earned the love and respect of the church. It is referring to men who are saved and who live a Christian life. These are to be men that no one can point an accusing finger at; good men who are worthy of respect. They are to be men of personal integrity and unblemished character. They must be men who avoid evil and seek the well-being of others.

They Were To Be Godly Men – They are also to be “*full of the Holy Ghost*”. This means that they are to be Spirit-filled and Spirit-controlled. The Deacons are to be men, who are in tune with God; led by God and who display godly ways in their lives, **Gal. 5:22-23**. The church will forever regret electing men who are not full of the Holy Ghost to be Deacons. A man who is not filled with the Spirit, but who is filled with his own ways will be a thorn in the side of the church for as long as he serves! Be cautious about the men you select!

[They Were To Be Gifted Men – They are also to be “*full of... wisdom*”. This means that they are to be able to make sensible decisions. They are not to be influenced by personal opinions, family concerns, or emotion. They are to make their decisions based on what “*thus saith the Lord*”. They must be men who can move beyond their own boundaries to see the needs of others. Far too many Deacons bring their own agendas to the meetings. When the Deacons meet, they must always seek what is best for the whole church!

I Tim 3: 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.

You’ll notice from these verses that God is far more interested in the spiritual maturity and moral character of the deacon than He is in the exact role a deacon fills within the local body of believers. With that in mind, let’s examine what God expects from these deacons.

- 1) The first requirement is that deacons be reverent.
 - This is an older word that we have lost a sense of in this generation.

- It speaks to a life that is marked by personal dignity, a seriousness of purpose and self-respect in conduct.
- The reverent person is one who carries himself in such a way that they earn the respect of other people.

2) The second requirement is to not be double-tongued.

- To be double-tongued is to talk out both sides of your mouth. You tell one person one thing, and the next person something else.
- But Jesus says in Matthew 5:37, “But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’”
- It’s bad enough when Christians don’t speak straight, but it can be disastrous when deacons are caught being duplicitous.
- It can lead to dissension, accusations and worse. Proverbs 6:16-19 deals with this. The deacon who spreads innuendo, gossip and lies through an insincere tongue can do major damage to the church.

3) Third, the deacon is not to be given to much wine.

- The man called to be a deacon must be self-controlled. This is part of the reverence we saw earlier.
- He is also a model for not only those in the church, but for those outside.
- Romans 14:21 says, “It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.”
- This goes for all believers, but the deacons and elders are called specifically to mind how they think and act toward wine.
- To be “given” toward wine means that it has a hold on one’s mind...that it draws away one’s attention. It’s the same word that

Paul uses in the next chapter of 1 Timothy, 4:13, when he says, “Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.”

- For the deacon, alcohol should not gain his attention.

4) The fourth directive concerns a deacon’s attitude toward money.

- Paul writes that the deacon should not be “greedy for money”.

• It should never be the case that a deacon has such a love for money that it

negatively impacts his integrity.

- And this isn’t just in the church, this is in all aspects of his life.

• Jesus says in Luke 16:13, “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will

hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise

the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

- It’s an impossibility to be an effective deacon, called to a high level of spiritual

service, and have divided loyalties because of materialism and the love of

money.

5) The fifth requirement for deacons is a real faith.

- Verse 9 of the text states that the life of the deacon is characterized by, “holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.”

• Paul uses the word “mystery” often in his epistles. But the mystery he speaks of is not like being in some cult or secret society where only a few know the true beliefs of the group.

• For Paul, the mystery is the revealed revelation of Jesus Christ in the form of the gospel, “which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints” (Colossians 1:26).

- The deacon is to hold this mystery of the faith, the gospel of Jesus Christ with a pure conscience.

- Scholar H. C. Hahn writes this about how Paul and the early church viewed the conscience: “The Greeks saw conscience as something bad operating retrospectively. Christians came to see conscience as being made clean through trust. Its purity lay in the believer’s knowledge of his standing in Christ.”
- Having a pure conscience has two practical applications:
 - First, the qualified deacon must be a blood washed believer in Jesus Christ, who has followed in believer’s baptism.
 - Second, his theology and his actions must be in line with one another. He can’t be living a lie, spouting Scripture on one hand and living like the devil on the other. His walk and his talk must match up.

6) Requirement number six is that the deacon must be tested.

- The word we translate as “tested” can also mean “proved” or “scrutinized”.
- This is the same word Paul uses in 1 Thessalonians 5:21: “Test all things; holdfast what is good.”
- The reality is that these men have been in the process of testing for some time. They had to meet the criteria of deacon before they were recommended. We see this same thing in Acts 6:1-6, which gives us the account of the selection of the seven.
- Verse 3 is of special note: these were to be men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.
- The people had to already know this about these men. The examination had been going on for some time.

7) The result of this testing is the seventh requirement...a blameless life.

- This isn’t speaking of sinless perfection. None of us can claim that.

- But blamelessness refers to a life that is not burdened by accusations of impropriety.
- The life of the deacon is marked by freedom from charges, both within the church and in the community as a whole.

8) The lynchpin to the effectiveness of this husband/wife team is the eighth requirement for the deacon, which is that he is the husband of one wife.

- He is to be a one woman man. Many have said that this means a divorced man cannot be a deacon, or that it means that polygamists are disqualified.
- However, the reality is that the standard is much higher. It calls for total devotion, absolute faithfulness and moral integrity in regards to his wife.
- There have been many men who became deacons and had only had one wife, yet they had affairs, were consumed by lust or treated their wives harshly or with disinterest.
- In actuality, all of these men were disqualified to serve as deacons.
- God requires deacons who love their wives and whose marriages, both publicly and privately are exemplary.

10)The last requirement is consistency in their homes.

- The qualified deacon who has children still living in his home will bring them up to honor God.
- We can see this in the home of Philip, one of the original seven, in Acts 21:8-9.

Notice that the daughters were pure and that they proclaimed the Word of God.

- Deacons will be entrusted with many responsibilities within the church, and must be counted on to perform well. A man whose home is not in order will not likely do well outside his own home either.

Paul offers two promises in verse 13 to those who serve well as deacons:

- He first says that they will obtain a good standing. This is how they will be viewed by the members of the church. Don't take good deacons for granted, folks, because they are not that easy to find. When a man is faithful as a deacon, he should receive the honor of the church.
- The faithful deacon will also obtain great boldness in the faith. This means that they will experience a deepening of their faith and a stronger relationship with Christ as they submit to His leadership.
- You can see this in the lives of both Philip, who we've already mentioned and Steven. Philip became a bold evangelist, and was the first to proclaim the gospel to the Samaritans, as well as to a Gentile, in the person of the Ethiopian eunuch. Steven was the first Christian martyr, and the sermon he preached at his stoning was rife with the power of the Holy Spirit.
- So gentlemen, as you serve Christ well in the office of deacon, we look forward to seeing your boldness in the faith.

As I said earlier, Scripture is more interested in the spiritual qualifications of deacons than it is in the details of their ministry. But at the core of their role is service. The word for deacon is servant. They are not called to control the church, but to lead through service. The passage from Acts 6 portrays men who care for the physical and spiritual needs of the church. The constitution of this church bases its requirements for deacons on this model.

9) Verse 11 extends the requirements to the **wives of elders and deacons** and requires four things from her.

- She is first called to **be reverent**, just as her husband is. What sense does it

make to have a man who carries himself with dignity, but his wife is generally regarded as a flake?

- Second, she is **not to be a slanderer**.
- The Greek word here is diabolos, which when used as a noun refers to the devil.
- He is also known as the accuser, so the reference here is to someone who goes around making false accusations about others.
- She is also called upon to **be temperate**, which means that she too should abstain from alcohol.
- Last, she should be **faithful in all things**, which means that she is trustworthy and reliable.
- These qualities are in contrast to some of the young widows in Timothy's church, as Paul wrote about later in the book, in 5:13: "And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not."
- The deacon's wife is above all his helpmeet, joined to him in marriage. She can be very effective ministering with him, especially to other women. Her good conduct also is a testimony to his spiritual leadership.

