

## 210418 Apostles' Prayer for Deacons 38/15 April 18, 2021

### Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Dear Friends,

In [Ac 6](#), we find both wise counsel for a church and how she should go about conducting her business, as well as the origin and function of the office of deacon. The model set forth here predicts a healthy, praying, growing church, both in numbers and in the substance of faith. Based on this lesson, as well as Paul's extensive teaching on the function of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians, chapters 12-14, a healthy, strong church is a church where all the individual members use their spiritual gifts in harmony with each other for the health of the whole body, not for personal gain. When a church member, officer or not, attempts to manipulate the members to gain his/her personal wishes, the church suffers and becomes spiritually anemic. When all the members truly work together "*in the Lord*," as Paul repeated urged the Philippian Church, the resultant unity creates a spiritual strength and health that lifts the church above a mere social gathering, however benevolent, and makes it a spiritual force for godliness in the lives of her members and friends.

As I survey the impact of the COVID disruption and isolation of the last year on churches and sincere believers, I fear this area has suffered most. Some have taken advantage of the "Down time" and invested more time in reading, study of Scripture, meditation, and prayer, as well as reaching out by whatever means they could to encourage each other. Others have fallen prey to the paranoid suspicions of carnal minds and now must work doubly hard to regain their godly comfort and respect for truly Biblical personal fellowship with their spiritual family, as well as with the Lord.

In our study lesson, the church's choice of wise, godly men, and united prayer transformed a complaining, anxious church into a growing blessed church of power in the lives of her members. Do we long for that power in our lives and in our communities? This lesson, as well as a multitude of lessons in Scripture unite to show us the way. Do we care enough to be willing to transform our lives, habits, and attitudes, to do our part to make our church that kind of a church? The Lord is not limited. However, He will only empower a church with this dynamic grace that cares enough for Him and for His way to give up self and commit themselves to Him and His ways. To give up self and truly practice Biblical, [Php 2:2-5](#) kind of faith. This lifestyle is only impossible if we ignore this lesson and choose self over our brothers and sisters in the faith. If we practice this faith-walk, this lifestyle is not only possible, it is the most joyful experience you shall know this side of glory.

Lord bless, Joe Holder

### Apostles' Prayer for Deacons

*Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. ([Ac 6:3-7](#) KJV 1900)*

Most commentaries that I've checked interpret this lesson as documenting the origin of the office of deacon in the early church. I am inclined to agree. If we follow the New Testament pattern, the office of minister should be based on evidence of a calling or a spiritual gift from the Lord. No man can imitate that gift. Absent the evidence of such a gift and its consistently edifying use by the man in question, a church should not ordain a man to the ministry. Doing so imposes a burden on the man that he can

never carry.

According to the lesson before us, the office of deacon requires specific qualifications, but it is also based on a recognized need in the church. The man to be ordained to this office should demonstrate the qualities named, or he can no more live up to the work of the office than a man not endowed with the gift of preaching can fulfill that office.

If we follow Scripture, what is the New Testament relationship between a pastor and deacons in a church? Clearly, they are not intended to work independently of each other. Nor are the deacons to be viewed as the head or leader of a church. A deacon who views himself as the “Lord high sheriff” of the church is a dreadful curse to that church, not a blessing. Scripture never wastes words, but it also never leaves important issues in vague or obscure status.

“...whom we may appoint over this business.” What do these words mean? Who appoints the deacons’ activities on behalf of the church? I suggest that general New Testament teaching establishes a harmonious order of authority and activity in a local church. Based on [1Co 12:28](#), “...in the church,” I suggest that every spiritual gift the Lord gives to His church He sets *in* that church, not over it or independent of it. Any member of a church, regardless his office or position, who views himself as over the church, contradicts this passage and makes himself a curse to the church, not a blessing. Several passages indicate that a church’s pastor is over the church in terms of his preaching and teaching them. ([Heb 13:17](#) and context, [1Th 5:12](#), as two examples) I also offer that the Lord’s precise address, “Unto the angel of the church of...” in [Re 2-3](#), affirms the same point. The Lord’s warnings in these two chapters were specifically against the “angel” of the church, “angel” being translated from a Greek word meaning “Messenger”) However, in terms of general leadership, even a church’s pastor must take great care that he leads the church by personal example. ([1Pe 5:3](#)) A. H. Strong, Systematic Theology, one of the most comprehensive systematic theology texts I’ve ever examined, made a powerful and convicting point. The real test of every pastor appears in how well he taught and equipped the church he served *to wisely choose his replacement after he is gone*. That action manifests his leading by example.

At the time of the [Ac 6](#) events, the apostles were jointly acting as pastors of the Jerusalem Church. If a church today follows this New Testament example, the deacons will consult with and follow the guidance of the church’s pastor, not act independently of him, much less contradictory to him. A church where pastor and deacons communicate and work together is a blessed church. A church where pastor and deacons work independently of each other or at cross purposes is a church in trouble.

Apparently, from Pentecost until this occasion, the apostles had functioned in all the necessary activities of the infant church, both spiritual and natural. Not by divine command and definitely not in the contemporary form of Communistic government, the Jerusalem Church did function as a benevolent “Commune” of sorts. They pooled their money, for example. ([Ac 4:34-35](#)) The problem which surfaces in [Ac 6](#) that sets the stage for our study passage related to this action. A group of widows were neglected in the daily distribution of food and complained.

The time had arrived when the apostles could no longer do everything that needed to be done for the health and needs of the church, natural and spiritual. They needed help, but the spiritual health of the church must be regarded in their choice of men to step into this role and assist in the care of the church. They carefully stated the qualifications—*the required qualities*—necessary for the church to select the men who would help them in this work.

1. “...*men of honest report*.” The men appointed to this work would be responsible for significant sums of money and the resources purchased for the needs of the church. They must be men of unquestioned honesty. I spent most of my business career in the accounting and financial area of business. Honesty and fiscal integrity, requires both actual and apparent unquestionable integrity with

how one administers money.

2. “...**full of the Holy Ghost.**” They must be men with high spiritual qualities. A man might be a successful business man, but not spiritually enlightened. The men chosen must demonstrate a mature and profound spiritual inclination. Even at that early time, the defining basis for “*full of the Holy Ghost*” should be demonstrated by the man’s devotion to Scripture, not to his personal opinions or ideas. Much of what became our New Testament was, at this time, known by the verbal teachings of the eleven. Herein we should give double weight to the words, “**whom we may appoint over this work.**” A deacon should never make decisions regarding the church based on his personal opinion. He should make his decisions based solely on the teachings of Scripture and in consultation with his pastor.

3. “...**and wisdom.**” These men must be men with high spiritual qualities. What is wisdom, spiritual wisdom? Is it wholly born into the man? Or may a man devote himself to Scripture and to a mature spiritual mindset and grow into that wisdom? Three times in Proverbs, Solomon counseled his young son to “**Get wisdom.**” In each of these passages, he also counseled his son to get understanding, so the two traits are companions, though distinctly different traits. In a fourth Proverb ([Pr 17:16](#)), Solomon observes that a fool is not willing to pay the price one must pay to obtain wisdom, because he doesn’t have a heart for it. Simply put, he isn’t willing to invest the necessary life discipline to gain wisdom. Men chosen for this position in the church must demonstrate that life discipline.

4. “...**whom we may appoint over this business.**” These words are too simply and clearly stated to miss. Up to this point in time the eleven took care of this business, but the church grew to the point they could not give needed attention to the gospel and spiritual ministry, as well as attend to this natural business of the church. They intended to remain intimately involved in the “Business” of daily ministrations, but with the aid of the men here to be appointed. A wise deacon never works apart from or independent of his pastor. Both pastor and deacon should regard the “Business” of the church as a partnership in which men in both positions discuss and agree before acting.

Gracious cooperation of all the spiritual gifts and talents in a church bodes well for the prospect of a strong, spiritual, healthy church. For good reason, in the most extensive passage on spiritual gifts in the New Testament (1 Corinthians, chapters 12-14), Paul devoted most of a whole chapter to a comparison of the church and her various spiritual gifts to a human body. All the parts and systems of a human body must work together to ensure a healthy, functional body. The same applies to a church.

*Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.* The church heard the qualifications the apostles gave them and chose the seven men the apostles advised. The apostles then prayed and laid their hands on these men, a symbol of conveying authority to them. Our church observes a similar practice when we ordain a man to either the office of elder/minister or deacon.

Prayer was a key action in this process, as it should be in any activity a church takes in hand. Was their prayer answered? What do we read next in the passage?

*And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.* From a complaining stressed church, the Jerusalem Church was almost immediately transformed into a spiritually vibrant church. They grew in their knowledge—and practice—of the “word of God.” Their number grew in real disciples. Even a number of priests came to the knowledge of Jesus and joined the faith. We can only conclude that the prayer of the apostles and the church was answered with great power.

How many of these activities does your church need today, especially after the ordeal of COVID disruption? ***How much have you considered doing personally to contribute to those needs?*** Have you grown in your knowledge of Scripture, and in your practice of it in your daily life? Have you made a

point of reaching out in your neighborhood or your workplace to communicate your faith to your friends? Growing new disciples is not a unique assignment for the pastor. It is the spiritual task of every member. Instead of one person working to grow the church, every member should work to grow it. Few factors are as effective in gaining a person's interest in the faith as a peaceful, contented, and godly life. Persuade a person of your belief by argument, and you might gain a proselyte. Exemplify the faith in your life so that same person sees the work of faith in you and longs to find it for his life, and you lead him to discipleship. Pray for the power to be this example to the people in your life. And pray, ***believing the Lord is able and willing*** to answer that prayer for you and your church.

Elder Joe Holder