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Why Churches Need Deacons; Acts 6:1-7

GPBC

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Introduction - August is important in the life of our church because we will select four men to serve as deacons for a three year term. Because the office of deacon is so central to the life of a church, we want to be careful and biblical in our selection. I say that deacons are central to the life of the church because in the NT, there are only two offices in the NT church: the pastors and the deacons. This is the model of church government and organization given to the church by God. Both offices were instituted in order to nurture and sustain life within the local church by meeting the crucial needs of the church. Pastors are given to meet the spiritual needs of the church through overseeing its direction and feeding the flock the Word of God. Deacons are given to meet the physical needs of the church through channeling resources so that genuine needs of the church as a whole and its individual members do not go neglected. In this way, the congregation is sustained and enabled to grow because the spiritual and physical needs are being met. In fact, the word pastor means “shepherd,” and the word deacon means “servant.” The very terms point to the function of these officers!

Simply put, the church needs pastors and the church needs deacons. If this were not the case, God would not have established these offices in the NT. What we are after this morning is to understand why the church needs deacons. Beyond what a deacon is supposed to be, that is, a servant, why does the church need official servants? All of us are to serve one another, so why do we need a special office in the church designated as deacon?

Deacons are not to be merely decision makers, although there are decisions to be made if needs are going to be met. Deacons are not to merely function as a board of directors patterned after a secular business model. The church is a spiritual entity, not a secular institution. A church is created, not formed. Deacons are spiritual men carrying on spiritual service in the church. Ill. Sound equipment

The question then remains before us this morning, “Why does the church need deacons?” The answer is not “Because we’re Baptist and Baptist churches have deacons.” Why do we need deacons?

I. Churches Need Deacons Because the Greatest Need is the Ministry of the Word.
(vv 2, 4)

A) Deacons serve the church foremost by allowing the pastors to concentrate and focus their attention on the teaching/preaching ministry of the church. Notice that both the pastor and the deacon are involved in nourishment. The deacon is to make sure that the members have sufficient physical food, and the pastor is to make sure that the members have sufficient spiritual food. Now we know the soul is more important than the stomach, but an empty stomach diverts attention away from eternal matters. Therefore, the first priority of the deacon is to make sure that secondary needs do not infringe upon the ability of the pastors to meet the primary need of spiritual nourishment!

B) I want to note two implications from this cooperation of pastor and deacon.

1. First implication. In order for pastors to bountifully provide nourishing feasts of joy from the Word of God for the people of God on a regular schedule, large amounts of time are needed for textual study and prayerful meditation, not to mention the even larger portions of time needed for personal reflection, study, meditation, and growth.
 - a. by textual study I mean that every week I must get into the world of the biblical text. I've got to study the words in the text. I've got to study the context of the text. I've got to be able to step into that world and know it so that I can bring it out for us on Sunday. The formation of a sermon is a lengthy, time-consuming process, and on a normal week I have the privilege of preaching 2 sermons and leading 1 devotion. In addition to Martin and I preparing sermons and lessons and Adam preparing to lead in song, we are also to give special attention to other pastoral duties such as home visits, hospital visits, counseling, participating in meetings, conversations, and planning and looking ahead.
 - b. Then there is prayerful meditation. Sermons are not for the purpose of just regurgitating information. After the textual study comes the prayerful meditation on how best to deliver and communicate the sermon. I preach it to myself over and over and over again before I preach it to you on Sunday. While I am meditating on the text, I am asking questions like "Is that really the point of the text?" "Is this the best way to say this?" "What would be a good illustration to help people see it?" "What would be a good application to help people apply it?" "Do I shorten point 1 to emphasize point 2?" These are the questions I am constantly asking in my mind all week long. And I'm praying for God to help me preach faithfully, accurately, passionately, and pastorally. And then I preach the sermon. And guess what goes on in the back of my mind over Sunday lunch and into Monday morning? Prayerful evaluation. I preach my sermons again, and hundreds of times I'll think of a way it could have been said better. And then the process starts all over again. And on most weeks, there are three sermons rolling around in there!

- c. Now, you might think, boy that's really a heavy load to carry. Actually, I think it's the best job in the world! I get paid to spend my life in the Bible!
 - d. However, I could not spend my life in the Bible in order to properly feed you a regular, consistent diet of the Word if my time was eaten up by secondary needs.
 - e. And then there is the prayer that is needed for the spiritual needs of people in the church and not in the church.
2. Second implication. When the apostles say they will not be distracted by these needs, that is not to say that these needs are not important!
- a. Physical and material needs of the church and its members are vitally important, but pastors already have a full-time obligation to the Word.
 - b. Deacons are making sure the roof is not leaking in the church and the fallen tree is removed from the member's yard, and the single mother has the support she needs, and the AC is working, and the widow is not being overlooked, and the other member is not being neglected, so that these needs do not infringe on the pastors to the neglect of meeting the spiritual needs of the church.

II. Churches Need Deacons Because Members Have Genuine Needs. (vv 2-3)

- A) Genuine needs arise in the church that require the attention of the church. Deacons serve the church by helping us identify those needs and meet them.
- B) Deacons are not to be the only servants of the church! We are all servants. We are all ministers. We are all brothers and sisters in Christ. Therefore, there should be a sense in which we are looking out for one another and helping to meet one another's needs without having to bring it to the attention of the church. Just quietly serving and helping one another in the love of Jesus! We are to deacon one another.
- C) But some matters require oversight or organization or church-wide involvement. Those types of issues are where the deacons come on the scene and make sure that needs are met.
- D) I keep saying genuine needs because there must be a distinction between a hand-out and help-up. This is why in deacon ministry, the elderly, the widows, the single-parent homes, the overlooked member take priority. Facility and grounds needs don't go unnoticed so as to distract. We need deacons because the church and its people have genuine needs.

III. Churches Need Deacons for the Preservation of Unity in the Body.

- A) I want us to see in this text that the underlying reason for selecting seven men to serve tables was not just to make sure all widows were adequately cared for. No, it was so that a potential for division was quelled.
- B) Behind the charge of v1 lies a dragon of social tension! Food is not really the problem! It is a problem. The church does need to make sure that the widows

are treated equally. But the big issue here is a point of contention between different kinds of people, Hellenists and Hebrews. Hellenists were Jews who had adopted the Greek culture and language. Hebrews were Jews who had retained their Jewish culture and language within Greek society. You already see the potential for division. Hellenists would think those backward Hebrews need to get with the times. Hebrews would think those Hellenists have forsaken our roots. The potential for division here is explosive!! Will the Hellenists leave? Will the church split?

- C) This is the first test for the Early Church. Can the Gospel not only save, can it foster unity around the cross with people of such diversity? Does the Gospel really transform lives? You must see that this is what is really at stake here!
- D) And for the early church, the answer to that question was to initiate a process and office that would quickly become known as the deacon. My friends, deacons are God's gifts to his church for the preservation of unity among his people! Nothing causes division to erupt quicker than favoritism and partiality, cliques and opinions!
- E) One last thing to please notice with me carefully. This issue of unity, which is at the heart of how a deacon serves the church, is precisely why deacons must be carefully, prayerfully, biblically chosen. (v 3)
 - 1. good repute - they cannot meet the needs of those who do not trust or respect them.
 - 2. full of the Spirit - just because deacons meet physical needs does not mean deacons are not about spiritual business!
 - 3. full of wisdom – That doesn't mean common sense or conventional wisdom. That means godly wisdom and discernment to determine the genuineness of a need and how the church should resolve it.

Conclusion - V7 makes all the difference in the world to this text, to the office of deacon, and to our task of nominating men to fill that role. "The word of God continued to increase" why? because the apostles were enabled to stay focused and concentrated on it.

"the disciples multiplied and even a great many priests came to the faith" why? because the church didn't split! The Gospel advances to the degree that the church is unified in love and faith!

The question before us then is this: Who are the men in our church who will serve us in this way? Who are the men who will meet our genuine needs, and foster unity among us? Who are the men qualified for this task? Who are the men whom God has given us to serve the church and serve the Gospel in this way?