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Choosing Deacons – Choosing Servants; Acts 6:1-7

GPBC

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Introduction – Today we ordain Preston Thomas to serve as deacon. What's taking place here today may seem odd if you're unfamiliar with it, and also if you are familiar with the process but not aware of the biblical basis. Today's text does not mention the word deacon but there is widespread agreement that what we see in Acts 6 is the beginning stages of what would later become the office of deacon in the local church.

The book of Acts accounts the events that transpired soon after the Lord rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. From that point, the apostles began proclaiming the gospel in Jerusalem, many people came to the Lord, and the formation of the local church appears.

By the time we get to the epistles in the NT, these are letters written to local churches. Acts, then, is that period transition from the resurrection to the local church. Part of that transition was the establishing of local church leadership. Wherever the gospel went, people were saved, and they began to assemble together for worship. Local churches sprang up. Who would lead these churches once the apostles passed away? We learn from the epistles that God's plan was for pastors and deacons to lead local congregations.

So the mantle of spiritual leadership is passed down from apostles to pastors. Eph 2:20 says the church of God is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. The Prophets of the OT and the apostles of the NT are the foundation. The foundation has been laid, there are no longer prophets and apostles. Now the spiritual leadership falls upon pastors. Eph 4:11.

The next epistle is Philippians. 1:1. The local church in Philippi is led by a group of pastors and deacons. The pastors oversee the spiritual care of the church. What about the deacons? Who are they and what is their assigned role?

- I. A Problem Arose (v1)
 - a. One of the responsibilities of the new church that was forming in Jerusalem was to care for the widows. In 1 Tim 5 Paul instructs

Timothy to care for the widows, who are widows indeed. In another words, if there was no family to care for them, the church was to care for them. (cf. James)

- b. Hellenists refers to Greek speaking Jews. Jewish widows had moved to Jerusalem when their husbands passed and would have received help from the synagogue. But now that some of them had become disciples, the church cared for them. They would have been a minority group, whose language and culture differed from the Hebrew widows.
 - c. You can easily see why this creates a major problem in the early formation of the church. The gospel is meant to unite people from all backgrounds and languages. So great care must be utilized in the church to guard against disunity and division. The Hellenists, a minority group within the church, have a legitimate complaint and if not addressed could endanger the great revival taking place in Jerusalem.
 - d. Guarding against disunity has always been a challenge for the local church and always will be because the enemy loves to divide and tear down and discredit the work of the gospel.
- II. A Solution Was Given (vv2-4)
- a. Note that the 12 apostles did not take on this task themselves. There were 12 of them. They could have said ok let's set up a rotation and we'll each take a turn distributing provisions to all our widows. They knew if they began to take on additional tasks, soon their time would be filled with responsibilities other than what God had called them to do. Which was, they said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables." V4 they said, "we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."
 - i. Those 2 verses lay out the job description of pastors in 3 points. Pastors are called by God to spiritually care for the local church by praying, preaching the word, and the ministry of the word.
 - ii. Ministry of the word would include things like counseling, discipling, witnessing – applying the word to the local church. In fact, devising this plan was a type of ministry of the word.
 - b. V3 we see the plan.

- i. Pick out from among you – the church was to select men from within the church to take charge of this matter. In that way, the issue would be resolved and the apostles would not be deterred from their calling.
 - ii. Seven men – a sufficient number so that the widows would not be neglected and the men chosen would not be overwhelmed.
 - iii. Of good repute, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom – in other words, outstanding believers. Men of integrity who clearly demonstrated they lived their lives led by the Holy Spirit and were trusted to exercise wisdom.
 - c. Notice with me the church was not instructed to choose men they were related to, or who were popular and influential in the community or church, or who had been extraordinary and successful, or who held the same opinions on matters of the church, or who fell into a certain age-range. I've heard all of those reasons given for choosing deacons and not a one of them can be found in the Bible.
 - i. Here is how we can prepare to choose men as deacons. 1. Pray. Ask God who He has been preparing to serve. 2. Who stands out as having the spiritual reputation of integrity, Spirit-led, and wisdom? 3. Look for the men who are already serving.
 - d. Once the church has made their selections, they are appointed by the apostles. Some kind of approval takes place and the apostles charge or assign these men their duties.
 - e. What are the duties of the deacon? V2 – to serve. The word deacon literally means servant. Deacons are to make sure the physical and material needs are being addressed and that no member is being neglected.
 - i. DFM. Checking in. touching base. Praying. Making sure no one is neglected. You should know who your deacon is because that's why we have deacons – to serve the church, help meet the needs.
 - ii. Let me say this – the deacon body is not the complaint department of the church. We don't have a complaint department. V1 uses the word complaint, but for our purposes let's call that a legitimate concern. It was legitimate because it could result in disunity. But it wasn't a matter of preference or opinion or personal disagreement.

1. Our deacons are available to hear our concerns but not our complaints. What's the difference? A concern is when you are aware of something unbiblical, unethical, immoral, or divisive. That would be a legitimate concern.
2. A complaint is when you just don't like it, so you feel compelled to talk to someone about it. Grumbling and complaining about matters or leadership are sinful because they are divisive. So what should we do when we have a complaint? Don't go to the phone – go to the prayer closet. Go to prayer. Go to the word. And do what you need to do to preserve unity.

III. Seven Deacons Were Chosen (vv5-7)

- a. The church chose 7 men who were spiritually suitable.
- b. All 7 were Hellenists to ensure the issue was resolved.
- c. The apostles prayed over them and laid hands on them – they set them apart for this service. They were ordained.
- d. V7 – the issue was resolved, unity was preserved, the apostles continued to preach and minister the word, and God blessed with many salvations, even many priests!!

Conclusion – So the point of it all was to serve the gospel. Pastors focused on prayer and word. Deacons serving the needs of the church. Unity maintained at all costs.