

THE MEN WHO MINISTER

Acts 6:1-7

INTRODUCTION:

It was out of the little troubles in the church, that the need for Deacons first arose. The office of Deacon was unknown during the ministry and life of Christ. Jesus' strategy for handling problems which arose in the church, is found in (Matt. 18:15-17). "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained a brother. But if he will not hear thee, take it to two or three more, in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established. If he neglect to hear that, then tell the church. If he will not hear the church, then she shall be unto thee as a heathen."

It was from the New Testament church from the book of Acts that the need arose for Deacons. Jesus had risen from the dead and returned to his Father. He had left the infant church in a hostile world. Almost immediately after Christ ascended, the church was beset by little problems. Meeting places had to be selected. A new Apostle had to be elected to fill the place of Judas. And there were other problems that were not all spelled out in the New Testament.

The origin of the church, the original word - ecclesia occurs three times in Matthew, 23 times in Acts, 62 times in Paul's letters, twice in Hebrews, once in James, and 3 times in the Epistle of John, and 20 times in the book of Revelation. Jesus did not coin this word. He found it in common use as John the Baptist, baptized and employed what was at hand.

Among the Greeks, ecclesia was the assembly of the citizens of a free state, gathered by the blowing of a horn through the streets of a town. In this sense, the word

in the New Testament, Acts 19:39, is used. The town clerk advised Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen to submit their case to the Greek Ecclesia.

Now the Hebrews thought of it as a congregation of Israel. A symbol before the tabernacle in the wilderness. By the blowing of a silver trumpet. In this sense the word is used in Acts 7:38 and Hebrews 2:12.

(Stephen) rehearsing the history of Israel, says Christ was in the ecclesia in the wilderness. And the writers of Hebrews quotes the Psalm by David where in a sense he was in the congregation. Psalm 22:20, Israel in the land of Canaan is never called a church. But with the Greeks and the Jews, the word denotes an assembly of people. Not of a committee or a council.

Therefore, the early Christians conveyed the same general idea - "called out" and in addition, "collected unto Christ." And there were three general uses of this word - the Greek, the Hebrew, and the Christian. So the Christian useage had three ideas. First, an (institution.) Second, a (particular congregation) And third, the (redeemed of all time.)

For centuries contraversary raged about the meaning of church in the New Testament. Many Christians were (hazzy) on the subject. There were those who followed certain traditions. Ecclesia then occurred about 114 times in the New Testament, and 109 times it has a Christian significance, as to the classification in Acts 9:31 is listed as local - meaning the Jerusalem church. Which had been scatter abroad by the persecution of Saul. So the classification summary of Christian useage first, an (institution,) 14 times. Second, a (local congregation) - 93 times. And third, (all the redeemed) 2 times.

I. AN INSTITUTION - Matt. 16:18

" Upon which rock I shall build my church. " (Jesus) never built but one thing after he

quit the carpenter shop in Nazareth. That was his church. The emphatic word "my" distinguishes Christ's church and Hebrew assemblies.

And such adjectives as universal, invisible, spiritual, Catholic are human terms and adjectives that have been used and were not inspired of Christ. This divine institution depends in a very important sense upon man confessing. Now merely upon the man Peter, as held by the Romans, nor upon the confession alone as held by some protestants. But upon the man who confessed the essential deity of Jesus.

This confession was an exercise of the heart rather than of the intellect. With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. We confess Christ, we profess a religion. Peter did not merely intellectually understand Christ but what Peter did and what he said was that flesh and blood did not reveal it unto thee. But my father who is in Heaven was Jesus' way of saying that divine power worked on Peter enabling him to make a good confession. No man can say Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Spirit. I Cor. 12:3.

Now the church is an institution has always been composed of frail human material like Peter. Who by the Holy Spirit acknowledged Jesus. To this institution and its representatives was committed the authority to announce the terms or conditions on which God would forgive sins. So the power that was conferred upon Peter was conferred upon the ten Apostles. John 20:23. And upon the whole church. Matt. 18:18.

Jesus had in mind an institution as he said, tell it to the church. If he will not hear the church. Matt. 18:17. It is like the Presidency of the United States, we've had many Presidents but only one Presidency.

The figure of a building was used for the church as an institution. Why is the church, as an institution, takes concrete shape, in the local congregation and community.

A building is never called a local church in the New Testament. Though such usage is in current use. Looking at the institution figure, and the buildings - the fundamentals of this. First Christ is the designer. It is designed for Kingdom purposes. Second he is the architect. He specifies the material that goes in the building. Third, he is the builder - he selects the materials and fits them together. Fourth, he is the foundation. Other foundation can no man lay. Fifth he is the owner - my church, the title ownership. Sixth, he is the occupant. He occupies the building by the Holy Spirit.

The figure of an organism was used for the church as an institution. Therefore, Christ is the head. His rulership was exercised in the Holy Spirit. The church is Christ's body. That body is vital. Christ is also the head over all things in the church. He exercises power. And the church expresses the fullness of Christ through his glory.

*NOV. 17. News Week - "Defenders of the Faith" Article ON Church of ENGLAND - Maintains as it is. 130yr old St Barnabas, Anglican ch. falling to pieces, windows smashed, weeds high, rubbish, serves parish of 13,000 - less than 20 members attend - we have lost hope says the Vicar. The only time they need me is when they are dead!" Ch. goes down from 3 million to 2 million in 20 yrs, Last Easter Sun 1st of the larger Anglican ch's had on \$35 in contributions.*

## II. A PARTICULAR CONGREGATION

This is a predominate use in the New Testament. It means regenerated persons in a locality - unite themselves (voluntarily) under Christ's laws and membership in the church is not hereditary like membership in a family. Or a state. It is optional.

The earliest churches met in private homes. The Lord's Supper was observed in these churches. Acts. 2:46. The primitive church met in the home of Mary. Acts. 12:12. In the house of James. Acts 21:18. Peter sent salutations to three house churches. Rom. 16:5. Many a church in modern time has begun in a private dwelling. The First Baptist Church of Richmond was constituted in 1780 with 14 members who met in the house of one - Franklin.

### III. QUALIFICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP

In the churches of the New Testament - they were well defined.

Not all residents of the town could participate in the Greek assembly. The members must first be (free men) And there were requirements and qualifications in the membership of the Jewish congregation. The Proselytes must first be circumcised.

Now a Christian church requires faith. And baptism in order for membership. It has been stated as faith baptism.

Now every (secret order) has its own initiation and its own invitation. Now this is not to say they do not esteem and love the other orders. Members of one lodge may pass to other similar lodges without any new initiation.

Now with Christians we go from one church to another.

### IV. THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT

These local congregations <sup>Not</sup> = one church having authority over another church. Or one man or a group of men exercising over another group. Or one territory serving other churches is foreign to the New Testament.

Those nearest Christ's interpretation is that the authorities and the membership of the church as we witness Mathias by the 120 - Acts 1:15-22.

The choosing of the 12 by the multitude of the disciples. Acts 6:2.

The appointment of Barnabas as a committee from the church which was in Jerusalem -

Acts 11:22.

The setting apart of Barnabas and Saul by the church at Antioch - Acts 13:13.

The sending of Paul and Barnabas concerning the controversy at Antioch - Acts 15:3.

All of these are abundant proofs of the congregational control and exercise in their own affairs and discipline.

From these Scriptures it is evident that a particular assembly was self-governing. Jesus had safe-guarded his churches against peril, the form of government that would obligate them in any other way. The local church is fundamental in the Gospel - a clear understanding of the Gospel church is so important that we need to have the proper view. That it is an organized body of believers, baptized with equal rank and privileges, to administer the affairs under the headship of Christ. They are united in belief, in what they teach, they have coveted together, they co-operate together in Kingdom movements.

It will be good if we could analyze something about the church further.

We might talk about it as an organized body. A church is not a mob, nor a mass-meeting - it is more than a congregation. John the Baptist preached to multitudes. Many of them followed his teaching but they were not a church - they were unorganized. Jesus began the first Christian church, with two of John's disciples. He gathered others and he worked this material into an organization and he filled it with power on Pentecost.

Thus the course of missions as Paul planted the Gospel everywhere - he counted his work complete. He had organized a church, ordained a pastor, and they began to reach out in their own group.

Second, it was a body of believers - baptized. Baptism means baptism. It is trans-

lated in this way. The description and the administration of this ordinance emphasizes that it is of the believer. Those who have exercised saving faith in Jesus Christ. John the Baptist demanded a change of heart before he would baptize those that came to him. Jesus commanded that discipling should precede baptism. Those who gladly received his word were baptized by Peter and the others.

Phillip first led the <sup>strangers</sup> ~~un~~to believe before he baptized them. Paul's converts even in the household were described as believers.

Third, the church body is of equal rank and privilege. A ruling class is foreign to a Gospel church. Jesus condemned such custom of the Gentiles and said of these people - it shall not be so among you. Officers are not chosen for service to be dictators - but for leadership. Not to be Lord over somebody. And a man's character for this service gives him the competence of his brethren. One has no more influence than anybody else in the New Testament church. His power with his fellow members is not officially ahead of even the Pastor, who the Holy Spirit makes the overseer. Cannot exclude the least significant member. As a member of the church, we are, according to the ministry, as one.

Therefore, we are equal - only in the Gospel church is this true. No other or no civil government (grants equal) rights, to the old, the young, the rich, the poor, the male, the female as does membership in our church. It entitles every member to a voice and to a vote. Hence we seek a pure democracy and this seems to be the only one in the world today. Of course these privileges bring to us some responsibilities. And democracy always has some perils attached to it - and it is frightening in a way.

But this body administers its own affairs under the headship of Christ. That is to say, this church, in its authority is limited in determining the temporal affairs

only as is controlled by Christ. Christ is the law maker - he is the head over all things.

In the next place, this <sup>(4)</sup>body is united in the belief, of what Christ has taught - that means in common faith. The faith once delivered unto all the saints. We have embraced this - this is the doctrine that we work upon. That Jesus Christ is the Saviour. He was God's man - made an atonement for sin. And the office and the work of the Holy Spirit has not sent the power and the sinners repent toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It then goes that a member who is a part of this body cannot repudiate these doctrines or stifle his conscience. How can two walk together except they be agreed. So he has coveted and is under the Lord's command to go - evangelize - baptize - and to make disciples of all nations. He is to take this commission to heart.

Therefore the church is thought of as the Christian uses it as an institution.  
As a local congregation, and finally as all the redeemed of all times. But ye are to come to Mt. Zion, the city of the living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem and to the general church of the first born who are enrolled in Heaven. Hebrews 12:22. All from Adam to Christ who were saved by faith in a coming Messiah will be members of this church in glory. All from the days of John the Baptist - the second coming of Christ, are saved by faith in the son of God. And will members of the church of glory. All who have died in infancy, and all who lack the mental capacity are saved by the merits of Christ's death will be saved and will be members in the church of glory. This church will have no officers, no ordinances, no organizations. And the conditions of membership are regeneration, sanctification, and glorification. It is future as distinguished from the present church. In the institution and the local functions.

The church is to be the (lamb's bride) - the marriage will take place at the end of time. When Christ's redeemed work is finished. When all enemies are put under his



feet. When death is destroyed - when the bodies of the saints are raised, and then the glorious church and the beautiful bride - not having spot or wrinkle. But holy and without blemish will be presented to Jesus the groom. Eph. 5:27. So the church as an institution will merge into the church of glory. And that is in the future. How far away that is we do not know. But it looks and seems to be very, very close.

But while we are waiting on that, we must be busy about carrying on the business that is left with us.

I began by pointing out tonight that there were problems that had come forth in the church. And now that we have the meaning of the church - there was the development of the office of (Deacon). There were low murmurs heard that were going on in the pews during the business meeting. And it seriously hurt the fellowship of the church. Some of the widows were complaining about the unfair treatment. And they resented with a firm prejudice even the church dinners. The widows could come to the love feast (buffet) and if she was a good Hebrew she got an extra serving of food, a good Greek greeting and so she got a smaller portion. And so the Greek speaking widows began to complain and it was at this time, Acts 2:6, 2, and 4 - it is not by reason that we should leave the word of God and serve table. Wherefore brethren, look ye out from among you (seven) men of honest report. The Apostles were thus able to get out of the pantry and into the study.

We do not want to give the impression however that the Deacons were elected merely to be on a kitchen committee or to take care of all the (grumbling) in the church. Their election by the church was far more than this. As is can be seen by the activities of these men.

We should not connect this with a (hash line) or something like that.

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6:1-2

There were (deeper ministries) - (nor) should we leave the implication that small problems in the church should be (ignored). On the contrary. They must be dealt with while they are small problems. The grumbling of old women who had too much leisure time on their hands were endangering the warmth and fellowship.

The problem, small enough however, that there were some men who were capable of taking care of it.

The office of Deacon is a high office. And we look upon the Deacon, the Steward, the Elder as (not) just a trouble-shooter or a pastoral spy, or one who spend a little energy in the kingdom. They are (not) there for hindrance but for help. Sometimes people seem to think that these laymen are (elected) to do battle with the pastor - rather than work for the pastor. And quite (often) people poke fun at these laymen. And they take jabs at them. But I think every unkind thing that they can say about them - there are a thousand blessings that we can give them and we can praise God for the rank and file of those men who (do not) wind up with their pictures having numbers under them. There are lots of these fine men who have (spared) the church of many a miagrain and they have brought harmony. And some of them have been very faithful and they have tried to take care and wait upon the tables.

✓ I believe their job is to assist in the church. The church organized and functioning by (Dr. House) and Thompson. "They assist in preaching the Gospel in the body of Christ - to minister to members. The first helpers, deacons waited on tables, and made decisions regarding the distribution of food. Deacons are not the rulers of the church - rather they are called to minister. The word Deacon is derived from a Greek word which meant one who is a waiter on the tables. And thus the word came to mean servant in the New Testament. Simply the task to help with the Pastorial duties."

There are a (lot) of (ways) these laymen help in the church. They help to conduct worship, encourage family worship, administer ordinances, in the preaching program in

witnessing, in visitation, in acts of giving, in maintaining Christian fellowship, in supporting the Christian program of the church. So this is a fine definition of a Deacon. And he is ordained just as a pastor.

The phrase "assist the pastor" - is really the total service. They are to lighten the load.

The pastor almost has an (unbelievable schedule). Little of his time can really be his own. He is the victim of a heavy calendar. Counciling appointments, his whole life must be lived under the church. And of the community. And there is no way that the Pastor can escape the almost endless criticism which always comes his way. Someone wrote a little article on that -

It said -

If he is too young, he lacks experience

If his hair is gray, he is too old

If he has 5 or 6 children, he has too many

If he has none, he is setting a bad example

If his wife sings in the choir, she is being too forward

If she doesn't she lacks interest in her husband's work

If he speaks from notes, he has canned sermons and is dry

If he is extemporaneous, he is not very deep

If he spends too much time in the study, he neglects the people

If he visits, he is called a gad-about

If he is attentive to the poor, he is playing to the grandstand

If to the wealthy, he is an aristocrat

If he suggests improvements in the church, he is a dictator

If he makes no suggestions, he is just a figure head

If he condemns wrong, he is cranky

- If he does not, he is a compromiser
- If he preaches an hour, he is windy
- If he preaches less, he is lazy
- If he preaches truth, he is offensive
- If he does not, he is a hypocrite
- If he fails to please everybody, he is hurting the church
- If he does please everybody, he has no convictions.

Well, this thing goes on --

- If he receives a large salary, he is mercenary
- If a small salary, it proves he is not worth much
- If he preaches all the time, the people get tired of hearing one man
- If he invites a guest speaker, he is shirking his responsibility

So they say, a preacher has an easy time.

*Not true -  
eye large  
before*

*Pastor had a woman in his ch. always giving trouble. She  
never agreed with him on any thing - visiting one day -  
saw her on 3rd floor porch! Decided to go up visit  
and was so disappointed, knocked 3 times. Found her in her bed!*

But when such criticisms comes, and they frequently do, a good sensitive Deacon can with prayer, lift him out of that cellar. Not that your preacher expects to be petted because most preachers have to have a tough skin even as a Marine. But we do appreciate people who pray for us. And as we lay hands upon these Deacons tonight, we are commissioning them as a Pastor's assistant. That is all the credentials you need to share in bearing your Pastor's burden and to take up the important ministry in your church.

Now we have not over worked the Scripture - that a Deacon should be apt to teach - and it is good to have Deacons who can teach. But there are some men who cannot speak and cannot make good sermons. But they know how to talk in the spirit of God at

the altar.

Dr. Storer once said, "But I should like to testify after 20 years in one large church. My Deacons have helped me out of trouble 100 times for every one that they made for me. And today, he says, I would gladly leave my life and my future in <sup>to</sup> the hands of the noble men who serve as Deacons in my church." He was pastor in Tulsa.

I think most pastors would make the same sort of testimony. Few events or items which are debated in Deacons meetings will be remembered outside. But on nearly all occasions there will be prayer. And his job is not one that we despise, but we desire. To use for God's glory.

Acts 6:5 - We have the election of (Nicolas) - now he was a (bad Deacon) In all probability he was thought to be the father of the terrible heresy in the early church. Called (Nicolaitanism) - and that was a compromising doctrine that John attack in Revelation. They taught that good faith was a (blend of Christianity and paganism) and they allowed the eating of meats offered to pagan idols. And they were broad on morality. In fact, they already practiced the "new morality" that we know about today.

Now the (church) is still not free from the menace of the Nicolaitans - doctrinely unstable men, still sometimes get offices and jobs in our church. And there is perhaps often sometimes the enducement by some to lay their hands on rather than inspect the heart. That part is forgotten.

But thank God for those who are called and proven true. Such (Deacons) as (Phillip) and (Stephen) - Acts 6:5 - who are mentioned. Phillip witnessed by preaching the Gospel, by practicing personal evangelism for the sake of just an (Ethiopian).

(Stephen), the first Christian martyr, - martyr means to witness. And there is no

finer way to say I believe in Christ, than as he did when the stones were falling upon him. He might have begged for mercy, now this man witnessed. He died for Christ.

Stephen did not have to die for Christ. He had to witness for Christ but he did not have to die. It was because of his (compulsion) to witness that he martyred himself. I think every Deacon, every layman in the church ought to be possessed with this compulsion to witness. None other ever to have (no) laymen should ever have to be coherced into the churches' visitation program, into the prayer life of the church, into the worshipping, co-operating, Bible teaching. The true layman ought to feel that he has to witness whatever the cost to the schedule of his social life, or his physical well-being.

Service for Christ is (not) always the way of personal comfort. Stephen found this out. And certainly it should say to every leader here - that you are going to be a martyr to Christ, faithful to this office, that it does not bring you fame or fortune, to the man who wears it.

It is (not) just a position of prestige in the church. It is not an office that sells itself in that way. But every man should prepare himself to sacrifice.

Lord Bryce tells about Professor Macey of the University. He stayed some months in his household, at the University. There were no servants except the cook who was on a part-time basis and the English Lord, Lord Bryce, on the ground of experience in British where there were country homes and they had many servants, so about the Macey house he thought there was someone to shine his shoes if he left them outside the door at night. The Professor took the shoes each night and shined them himself. And his distinguished guest never realized that his host had been his valet. As a Deacon, you are to serve Christ - who once himself washed feet. For your Lord, for your

church, for your Pastor - there is no task that Christ will ask of you which is beneath your dignity. Remember for Jesus' sake - John 13:16 - the servant is not greater than his Lord. Neither he that is sent, greater, than he that sent him.

Sam Shumaker spoke when he said some of us are like others watching people play a game. We are not down on the field running and sweating - we are comfortable. It is like a T. V. show - others participate and we just watch.

He went on to challenge men to participate and not just be spectators. And I think this is what we need today. It is wonderful to have the women give their attention to the church. And the youth. But if a man can't love the church and give himself to it - then I don't think he ought to push it off on his wife. God has committed him with talents to work in business, and politics, and sports. And so he needs to excell in the will of God.

Missionary teacher: "An ideal is not yours until it comes out of your finger-tips."  
1st laymen were chosen for practical action.

And it is great tonight as I look down upon these men before us, who are accepting the depth of this commitment and what is represented in your lives. I believe that the women and the youth will follow and will co-operate, and will work shoulder to shoulder in this great task. In leading our church to be the kind of church that Jesus meant it to be.