

TEEN-AGE MOTHER: "Oh, dear, I don't know what to do to make the baby stop crying."

Teen-age Father: "You've got to do something. Where's the book of instructions that came with the baby?"

"DEACONS BRIDGING THE GAP"

Acts 6:1-8

INTRODUCTION

During an Ordination Service a newly elected Deacon was asked this question -- what contribution do you expect to make to your church as a Deacon - that you were not already making before your election.

This is a good question. What exactly is a Deacon supposed to do. Just what are his duties and his responsibilities.

Many Deacons don't have the slightest notion of what they are supposed to do. Here is an office that is different than any other volunteer job in the church, because of the care with which the Deacon is selected, and the dignity by which he is ordained to the office.

During our Ordination Services, we often say a great deal about the moral and spiritual qualifications and characteristics of the Deacon. Tonight I hope to say something that perhaps we miss, that is also found in the 3rd chapter of I Timothy, about the qualifications of a Bishop, Preachers, as well as Deacons. I think it could be said of Elders if you have Elders in your church. The leaders are very similar. Why are they so much alike. These high qualifications reveal and set forth the dignity and the importance of the office. And the responsibilities of the office are too important to be laid upon persons who are spiritually immature.

The man should be profoundly serious and his integrity should be unquestionable. And his character should be above reproach.

At the out set I would say that first, and last, and always -- the Deacon is a servant. He is a servant of his church of his Lord. And nowhere in the New Testament is it implied that a Deacon serves on a authoritative board which excludes the rest of the church. Likewise there is nothing in the New Testament that implies that the Preacher is sub-servient or subject to the Deacons. The Deacons are not some special clearing house. I think the false assumption brings about distrust. Most of our churches have responsible men who can serve on committees as elected by the church.

V.I. - First of all, note the problem. With all of the risk involved, God in his providence has seen fit to entrust the leadership of the church to men, of course, under the leadership and direction of the Holy Spirit.

Now the Bible gives us the treatment of some new problems and why the qualifications were so high. And why the Apostles requested that they choose some men.

First, caused by growth. ^{multipled -} The church, growing, created serious situations. Chapter 5. The Bible states in those days - what days, the days of expansion.

Second, concerned about the distribution of food. Some widows were being neglected or over looked in the daily affairs of the church.

Third, murmuring. Now this is a bad way of raising objections. I guess V. 1 - we would call this a growing tension in the fellowship of the church.

The word murmuring implies a secret displeasure, not only expressed - but the silent protest of dissatisfaction.

Murmuring in the church can be dangerous. It can be a real threat to the unity of the church.

Now the Apostles were not neglecting their work - they were working hard. But at the same time, there were some members who were not being ministered to.

The Devil tries an inside job. I think one of the disgraces of Christianity today is that we have so many church quarrels and split-ups.

When these things happen -- friends are divided. People are hurt. Sweet relationships are severed.

There is no need for a church to have a quarrel because they are not usually based on doctrine of faith. Most of the time it it hear say, trivial things, gossip, or misunderstanding.

There never will come up one single thing which cannot be settled in prayer. If we have the Spirit of Christ within us.

Christian quarreling causes Satan to sit back and laugh.

Growth brought problems to the leadership. The big task of distribution to help all -- they were unable to do.

It will not do for the church to be divided on this question. The Devil would split and hinder them. A lot of people were being saved and added to the church.

Peter and the Brethren investigated the complaint. We have been busy preaching and baptizing and what can we do about it.

I think Peter felt -- well, we can be preachers. Or we can be social workers or welfare workers. But God has called us to preach.

And the lines were being drawn that there was discrimination. The widows of Greek background were being neglected. And lines were being drawn.

V. 2 - It is not fit for us to leave the word of God and serve tables. In other words a division at any time is like to divert the preacher from his main job. The Apostles were charged with the responsibility of preaching the Word of God. They had to protect their position in order to maintain the confidence of all the people.

Now this was a very delicate matter. The fellowship of the church and its continuing growth depended upon the decision that was made at that time.

v. 3 So the (decision) was to seek out seven good men to look after the work.

These Deacons were to (bridge the gap) in church fellowship.

There was prayer. There was discussion. And the best interest of the church was considered. The most important work is to preach and present Christ to the people.

Even today, the most important work of the preacher is to get people ready to die. It is the supreme part of spiritual rebirth.

Now they worked this out in harmony and dignity. There were no accusations - there was no talking before they had done some thinking or else there would have been confusion.

They were doing what was right for the church.

And we are going to note what kind of men they were to be, as well as why they were chosen.

They were chosen to settle the problem. And this should be the goal of every Deacon.

The Deacon is not a problem maker. No man who takes the job of Deacon in the church or who has ever served as a Deacon should ever be a trouble maker in the church. He was chosen for settling disputes. No Deacon should be a rebel in the church. He is to create good will among the members. And co-operate with the work of all his church.

His position is not the purpose of objecting and rejecting but of bringing peace and harmony.

They were elected to settle a quarrel. And to my mind, Deacons should go the limit in keeping peace and harmony in the church.

Murmuring will take place and many churches have troubles which have been caused by Deacons. Now this is due to the fact that the Deacon fails to measure up to the Bible qualifications.

The suggestion was to get seven men of reputation, Godliness, wisdom to assist in the ministry of the church.

They were to have the approval of the church. James 2:14:17.

Five of these men we know little or nothing about.

Stephen and Philip were outstanding as witnesses. This ought to happen in every church. They were a help to the preacher.

In the Atlanta Constitution the editor wrote -- The modern preacher makes as many visits as a country doctor. He shakes as many hands as a politician. Prepares as many briefs as a lawyer. Sees as many people as a specialist. As good a financier as a bank president. And in the midst of all, he has to be as good a diplomat that he could umpire a baseball game between the Knights of Columbus and the Klu Klux Klan.)

Some time ago, some one published the research facts on 1300 preachers. Their functions were listed as six: Preacher, Pastor, Priest, Teacher, Organizer, and Administrator. Of the 1300 - they put the last thing first - that they had to spend their time doing -- administrator.

And they put the first thing - Preacher, fifth, in the list. They averaged 10 1/2 hours work per day. Seven times more administrating the task than in preaching - his primary function.

The greatest work is preaching the Word. If God has called him at all - he has called him to do just that. And nothing ought to takes its place.

Deacons were called to serve and be helpful to the pastor, and to the church.

The fore shadow in the Old Testament is Jethros suggestion to Moses. That he appoint judges to help in the smaller matters. Exodus 18:13-26.

So the church was to look out and find seven men led by the Holy Spirit. These Deacons were to deal with this situation. They were to be trusted by all of the people and they were to be big enough in Spirit and in attitude to bridge the dangerous gap in the fellowship and to bring about solidarity, and to stand there and reconcile both sides of the faction.

Because these men were of this quality - V. 8 - the Word of God increased and the number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly.

It is not unusual for Deacons to have to confront disgruntled members. Who are free about verbalizing their grievances against the church. Sometimes against the Pastor. But it is the bigness of the Deacon to protect the office

of the Pastor in order to preserve the sacredness of the Gospel. No wonder the qualifications were so high.

Let me note again, before we go on with the qualifications -- they were to bridge the gap between the sacred and the secular. Now this request may have been misunderstood. And it could have been dangerous. It could have been a wedge between the Preacher and the layman. But here the Deacons were to serve the tables - and give themselves to the lower secular responsibility. And there should be no wedge in between the layman and the Deacon. Their ministry was a joint affair. Today we have material needs and it is important that Deacons also help with the sacred. The preaching of the Gospel is not effective where there are gaps in the fellowship and gaps between the laymen within the fellowship about material things.

Christ had instructed that the Gospel be preached to all people. And of course, these Deacons were to assist him. And I believe that Stephen took it very seriously because he carried out the instructions of Christ. He was a Deacon who was obedient to the commission of Christ. And Saul could never forget that he consented to the death of that Deacon who dared to be big as the Gospel. It takes a man of courage and conviction as Stephen. And we need Deacons that will stand up and if the world wants to cast stones at them - all right. But if there is a gap that needs to be bridged in the Christian fellowship or within the membership -- the task, rests upon the Deacon.

Second, look at the characteristics.

First, honest. Acts 6:3. They were to give a strict account of the church's funds. Often pious people discount the business of the church. But these are things to be done in addition to worship. The needs of widows must be cared for. The integrity and the good reputation of the church must be protected. There must be reliability - they must be accredited. And they must be blameless - is what he is saying.

Second, full of the Holy Ghost. Acts 6:3. This means Godliness - this means lacking in nothing. Not dwarfed - but being full means to be covered in every part. This means in his spiritual out look. This has to do with your personal dedication, and spiritual mind. These men that serve as a Deacon or a Steward is not based on some secular prestige. It is not done because a man's wife wants to honor him. He is not to be made a Deacon because of his wealth. But the choice is to be made exclusively on his righteous life. They were to live in this frame of mind.

Now a Deacon lacking this is absolutely ruinness, a deadly foe to the progress of the Kingdom of God. And any man who does not have this quality ought to refuse the office.

Third, wisdom - Acts 6:3. Understanding of Gospel principles. Common sense attitude, toward life. That is wisdom of a spiritual nature. A man who thinks through practical ways of meeting human needs.

A man who does not depend on snap decisions.

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No novice should ever be appointed Deacon - less pride lift him up. And the

Devil bring condemnation to the church. He must give skillful management of the affairs of the church in handling disputes or dealing with wayward members.

Fourth, grave, I Tim. 3:8. He must be serious - not long-faced. Not like he seems to have a case of indigestion. It means that he is sensible and that he has a certain amount of dignity in his life. That he takes his responsibilities to his soul. To maintain a right relationship to God.

Fifth, not double-tongued, I Tim. 3:8. This qualification is first, second, and last - always. This means saying one thing to one person and something else to another. A man may have a lot of ability in other things - but if he has never learned to control his tongue, then he can create a lot of problems.

It might be interesting how some men are chosen or are elected, and why they are elected to be Deacons. They were chosen to speak the truth. They were chosen to speak the same thing to a man's face that they speak to his back.

The Indians used to have a word for double-tongued. They called it a forked tongue. Speaking out of the side of the mouth.

The business of the church is not common news for the street corner. And the man who is a Deacon must know how to hold his tongue. And keep the business of the church under his hat.

This has to do with the burden of conversation.

Sixth, not addicted to strong drink. I Tim. 3:8. Not intoxicating drinks. Not given to wine. This is the responsibility of the Deacon in the matter of alcoholic drink. The Deacon accepts a vow to make him a servant for life. And he must leave intoxicating drink out of his life.

The Deacon must be mindful that this will give the church a black eye.

No Christian should be found guilty of a double standard.

Seventh, not greedy. I Tim. 3:8. He should not be greedy for filthy lucre. Money becomes evil with him. I think tithing would cure this. He ought to be a regular giver consistently as the Lord prospers him in his church.

Eighth, hold the mystery of faith. I Tim. 3:8. He must do this with a clear conscience. Now this has to do with the inner secret of faith. This is the mystery. I Tim. 3:16.

Ninth, proven men. I Tim. 3:10. He must be tested as metals. No charge of wrong doing can be leveled against him. He is found blameless.

I think the church sins when she picks men who have not turned their backs upon the world. They will bring scandal to the church.

They should be blameless day in and day out.

Tenth, they should be the husband of one wife. I Tim. 3:12. His marriage relationship must be ideal. God ordained one man and one woman. A man with two or three wives living is not a man to be selected. And this same qualification goes for the preacher as well as the bishop.

Eleventh, manages children and home well. I Tim. 3:12. A Deacon must be a man who has taught his children in spiritual things.

His home should be an example for the pagan world to see the difference in a Christian home and a pagan home.

Twelfth, his wife. I Tim. 3:11. It says that she should not be a slanderer - her talk should honor the Deacon. Now the Devil is the chief slanderer. Now sometimes women are more prone to slander than men. Eph. 6:11, Luke 6:11.

Women are to be sober.

Their wives are to be faithful in all things - not gossips but trustworthy.

Some Deacons may say I am glad I got to be a Deacon before I heard this sermon. But I am telling you what God says.

Thirteen, his reward. I Tim. 3:13. He says that the Deacon will gain if he uses the office well - it will be like steps to a stairway. He will have a good foot hold. And it will take him to a higher rank in faith which is in Jesus Christ. The man who will dedicate himself to the principles thus outlined will

be a better man.

In the Third place he will bridge the gap between the preacher and the layman. This was the problem that they had. The first members of the church had to take their stand and some of them had to become Deacons and that takes character.

We might ask the question - what are the duties of the Deacons. ?

They are subject to work in the church - they have to solve the problems like these people here.

Second, they have to deal with visitation. They had to greet widows and the others that needed ministry. We have the sick, the lost and neglected, members today.

Third, they had to deal with the matter of stewardship. Someone must have the main job of handling the money. The material matters of the church - and it was the Deacons that had to bridge the gap here. Between the layman and the ministry in evangelism. Give his money to the support and seek to lead others in the matter of stewardship and to see that his church has a worthy budget. And that the things in the budget are used for the mission of the Gospel.

Fourth, he is to assist in the ordinances of the church.

Fifth, he is to be active in the organizations of the church.

Sixth, he is to develop spiritually in Bible reading and in prayer.

Seventh, he is to set an example for every member to follow. What if every member were like you.

What obligation does the church have toward the Deacon.

First, pray for them. Your Deacons need prayer. Many people will find fault - there are enough to do that. Pray for him.

Second, trust your Deacons. He is ordained of God to minister in this way.

Third, expect a worthy life from your Deacons.

So the church ought to be better spiritually and in better condition after the Deacons serve.

Acts 8:4 - The report was they were scattered everywhere abroad. They went everywhere preaching the word. And Phillip went down to Samaria and preached Christ. Such Deacons as Stephen and Phillip did not take over their duties without seriousness. And they did not try to do the preacher's job. But they were doing what they understood to be the basic nature of the church. They were appointed to bridge the gaps and they were to determined to do this at all costs.

Phillip established a president for witnessing, as a layman, he began a revival in Samaria, that brought about unclean spirits crying with a loud voice. Act. 8:7-8. The Apostles came to Samaria and approved of what he was doing. They did not begin that Revival but the Deacon, Phillip, used of God began that Revival.

When the church once again becomes more of a lay movement it will somehow be clothed of mighty power of God.

The Deacons are charged with the responsibilities of bring^{ING}-it to life.
Deacons also have a major responsibility in evangelism.

Phillip, who after his Samaria Revival, walked to the desert road and did what Jesus taught and practiced. He entered into a person-to-person witness about the Gospel of Christ.

What are our Deacons supposed to do. What have they done?

As I have pointed out - it is so noteworthy and so significant that they are next to the Pastor in qualifications for the job. And they are not merely a group to recommend buying something for the church.

Every ounce of a Deacon's energy is tested by his faith, as he prepares the way of the Lord. Insight, prayer, Godliness, integrity, confidence - he clears the atmosphere for the unhindered preaching of the Gospel. So that the preacher might have liberty to preach and freedom to feel that he can work and preach the Gospel without any fear.

Acts 21:8 is a touching scene. As Paul came unto Caesarea - he entered the house of Phillip who was one of the seven - and he spent some time with him. The honored missionary Preacher was visiting the home of an honored Deacon.

Before his conversion, Paul the missionary, consented to the death of one of the seven.

While Deacon Phillip faithfully moving through the walls of fire to preach the Gospel, Paul was threatening and breathing out slaughter against the followers of Christ. And now in old age perhaps, they met again. How grateful Paul must have been. For this Deacon, who shared and who dared to fulfill the demands of his office. Paul owed much to the success of his ministry, to this Deacon who had paved the way before he arrived.

We need more Deacons to day who will be faithful to their high calling in Christ. And may God give us Deacons who are not afraid to bridge the gap.

At the end of the 2nd World War, two men were leaving China. Both men had been stripped in a word. One of them was in tears. All of my years of effort are gone. We blew up the last oil well just before I left. All of the work of my lifetime is gone. He turned to the other man, and he said, what about your business.

The man said, I am a missionary. I turned my work over to the natives. The oil man said, how fortunate you are. Your work is in God's hands. It can't be blown up. Your work is God's work. I close by saying that the Deacon's work is God's work.