

S.N. Nov-17, 79 B.M. WALKER
(Ordination Deacons)

THE HIGH CALLING OF SERVANTS

I Cor. 4:1-2

INTRODUCTIONS:

As for us Apostles, men ought to think of us as ministers of Christ and Trustees. To handle God's uncovered truths. Now in this matter of trustees, the first and final requirement is that they should prove to be trustworthy.

We are considering tonight a great text - for on this day we have some men that are to be ordained and set apart as Deacons, having been elected and selected by the church of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

When you become a Deacon or a Steward in a church, or an Elder - or any other place of leadership as a Minister - you are assuming a responsible place of leadership and service in the kingdom of God. It is not simply an office of honor although it is certainly an honor beyond most of the things that can come into a man's life.

What does a Deacon serve - or any officer in the church. First, he serves a New Testament Church. Of which Christ is the head. And he is being set apart to serve God and his fellowman. And therefore we cannot over emphasize enough that there is no more serious, soberly choice in life, for a man to give himself to the service of Christ in the needs of his church.

The man who agrees to take such an office is to be an example in all of life. Church, home, and work. He is to be an example in spirit, love, devotion, loyalty, witnessing, attendance, stewardship, faithfulness.

He is to surrender himself to the leadership of the Holy Spirit, he is to grow through the privilege of prayer. He is to develop spiritually through reading the

Bible. He is to give evidence of his love by sharing it with others. He is to manifest a missionary concern for the cause of Christ. He must testify of the redeeming love of God to all people. He must support the organizations of his church, uphold his office with the best of his ability.

I would like to say to you commit yourselves to this great responsibility - and this applies to all people that hears this message, and fill any place in your church.

You have committed yourself first to participation. That is to the life of the church. Attendance at the regular services and meetings are a necessity.

Second, stewardship - to bring your tithes and offerings into the store house of the Lord, as God has commanded. Because leaders in the church cannot really discuss the spending of the tithes and offerings of others, if they themselves do not practice this proper giving which God directs.

Third, leadership - you as a leader in the church ought to be able to think about others.

Fourth, service - in your office you should be able and willing to serve at any place and at anytime - putting the call in claim of Christ and his church above all else. You are basically a servant.

Fifth, attitude - you must display a positive attitude toward the church and the church leadership. It is your attitude which creates the fellowship within the entire church.

Sixth, there should be Christian experience and stability. Paul says we should

not elect a novice but every Christian shall prove himself first in the smaller capacities of service and as you are willing to grow - then you grow in grace, love, and fellowship. And you lend stability to your church.

Seventh, personal life. Your habits, your conduct must be on the level that is high in the every day business life, in the family, among your friends. And in all these relationships, you should have a quality that is of the finest.

Now we go back first to the example of the New Testament Church. There is a murmuring in the first church. Now this may not be in accord with your thinking of the early church. But just following the death of Jesus and his resurrection, the Apostles and the followers of Jesus were trying to carry on in his footsteps. Yet, there became some murmuring - and sometimes this comes as a surprise to a new Christian. Even today when we think of what takes place in churches, that some Christians for a long time they cannot understand why there are murmurings in the church of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Let me illustrate this. First of all, the church, is the vehicle which God uses to mobilize humanity. In spite of humility and all its imperfections, we are imperfect people and we do have imperfect leadership - and this sometimes leads to imperfect fellowship. For no one who preaches the Gospel, or leads in anyway in a church - gives entire satisfaction to everyone, in the service of the Lord.

Now if there is a layman who thinks that he is going to please everyone and not have any criticism or difficulty, he is going to be sadly disappointed.

In this church the disagreement was over the Hebrew or Jewish widows. There

were the Greek widows. Now this would be a contrast with the old established members. The Jewish members who had been a part of the movement of Christianity looked upon Christianity as a fulfillment of Judiasm. They felt that they were the established people.

There were the new Greek converts, who came out of paganism. They were the new-comers. And they had an idea that the pastor was playing favorites and they disagreed with the way he dispensed the charity fund - that is the way he gave assistance to the poor.

Now look at the wisdom of these pastors. These wise men met together and said, this is not right.

What was not right? It was not right that there be confusion in the church. Without somebody giving attention to it. That we should be burdened down with confusion. And this would take all of our concern. And the minister was neglecting his primary role of proclaiming the Gospel - preaching the Word. This is not right.

The arms of the minister are not long enough but to encircle so many people. The task really is too big. And so we cannot find every unhappy widow or person who has a need. Nor can we find every group that is dissatisfied.

The preacher said if we do that, we will not be able to preach the Gospel. And that is our calling. This is the central thrust of the church. And we do not want to get side-tracked.

The wise man said, let's get together - and get some other men to help us. And it was a great day in the New Testament church. When they said, let's lay our hands on some laymen and let's ask them to share the responsibility. They brought this to the church and it pleased the church when they said, let us select

seven men and set them apart. And then the church said, we will do that.

And as we read, they set apart seven men. And what happened. What were the results.

The church grew and grew and grew.

This is what happens - a church will grow when men rise up and take the responsibility God has given them and Paul says in Timothy - serve the office of Deacon honorably and well. Doing what a Deacon is to do and a church will grow.

The great cry today is to get some laymen who will accept this challenge. Who will be so Christ-committed, so church honoring, and who will give priority to the claims of the church and Christ in their lives.

Dr. John L. Hill of Nashville was a wonderful man of God. He belonged to a lot of social clubs and activities, and commissions in Government -but he always said when somebody tried to have an activity on Sunday or Wednesday night, I'm sorry. If you have it then, you will have to excuse me - I have a previous commitment. When they asked him what is it - he would say, my church. I am a Deacon in my church and I have committed myself to be in my place everytime I am in the city. I will be at my church for the regular services.

What do you think would happen in every church if every Deacon, every Steward, every Elder, would look upon his position in the same commitment. And as the church lays its hands upon you - put the church first. It has prior claims on your service, your time, your finances, your support.

And you are responsible to the church to support the church. To support the

leadership of the church.

It is your business to serve and heal the breach - wherever there is discord - you are to be a peacemaker. That is your role. You go to the congregation and minister in behalf of the Pastors of the church. Bring the people together in full support.

Yes, you can influence the spiritual atmosphere of the church. And this would be the atmosphere of the congregation. You can cause it to be what it ought to be. It is your testimony and your life that will lift the level of the congregation.

Now when we come back to my original text here for a few moments. And see if we cannot unfold some of the wonderful connections that we have in the high calling as leaders in our churches.

I. WE ARE HELPERS OF JOY - (2 Cor. 1:24.)

Paul says, not that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy for by faith ye stand. What a wonderful task - what a high calling. The Gospel means glad tidings. In the Christmas story, the angel proclaims - behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy.

Phil. 4:4 - Rejoice in the Lord, always. Wherever the Gospel is received in faith, great joy. V. 4. How could it be otherwise. When we go out as leaders, with the Gospel of the forgiveness of sin through Jesus Christ, people rejoice.

A man of God once wrote we are beggars who tell others where they can get something to eat. We, as a beggar, tell another beggar, where he can get a meal. So we have to be hosts of the Gospel.

III. WE ARE DIVINELY APPOINTED STEWARDS WITH AUTHORITY FOR DISTRIBUTION. 1 Cor 4:1

Now the household in the days when these Scriptures were written knew nothing of free domestic helpers - all servants were bond slaves. In a larger household, an overseer slave or steward on behalf of his master made up the daily work list for the individual slaves.

The steward was also a bond slave. And bore the same fate as a slave - as did the others. But he had special position of authority. And Paul makes this into a picture in I Cor. 4:1. He says, we are stewards of the mysteries of God. Servants of God are assigned to a special place of trust within the church. Now the word which Paul uses here for servant is interesting. It originally meant a war - or the lower bank of a boat or ship - one of those slaves who pulled at the great sweeps. Which moved the boat through the water and through the sea.

And some have wished to try and make this a picture of Christ as the pilot. Who directs the course of the ship and the servant who accepts the orders of the pilot and labors only under the direction of his master. But God has given his servants a special place of trust within the church. They are children of God and they are servants of Jesus Christ. But by the call of God, they have been set apart to occupy a special key position.

What they do not arrange for, no doubt remains undone. This should get through to the leaders in the church. What they introduce can have a wholesome effect upon the church and is of primary importance.

Not without reason did our Lord spend an entire night in prayer, when selecting his Apostles. Luke 6:12-16.

Not without reason did Jesus admonish his Disciples - pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into the harvest. Matt. 9:38. God's servants are men with whom the entire group aligns itself. And we salute the men of God in church history when God has introduced great movements.

Think of two or three. Hudson Taylor - the founder of China's mission. Moody - the great evangelist stirring two continents to God. William Booth - the founder of the Salvation Army. Let no one doubt the fact that God desires to do a great work through men. Every leader in the church should realize this. Today we see how God is using Billy Graham as an evangelist, throughout this world. Now each of these people that I have mentioned, in his own time - has been in the front ranks of God's work radiating power. Each an effective example challenging others.

This God-given service, as a steward, is certainly tremendous. This task can be accomplished only through prayerful attendance and obedience to the Holy Spirit.

This involves that you must have a spiritual vision and you must be qualified brethren. And there must be loving confidence toward all.

Paul moreover says in V. 2 - it is required of a steward that a man be found faithful.

IV. WE ARE OARSMEN IN CHRIST'S BOAT

I have already referred to this earlier - but in a Bible sense, this begins with

Noah's Ark and it has its New Testament contrast in the boat of the disciples on a stormy sea where Jesus stilled the storm.

V. 1- Is a fitting description - the servants of Christ are oarsmen. Paul is thinking of the ancient slaves - often chained at their rowing stations. Rowing in unison as the coxswain beat out the time.

What a striking picture - a servant of God is a sailor for Christ. Who's task consists of rowing in Christ's boat. And so our concern should be that even the smallest task - even in an obscure spot results in a major contribution to Christ's kingdom.

When we look over at V. 11 and 12 - we read that as he spoke of these leaders going through the country serving, he says they are buffeted - that is the word that is used for beating a slave. And Paul was willing for the sake of Christ to be treated like a slave. Paul says when we are insulted, we bless. We very probably do not realize just how surprising a statement this would be to a pagan when it would be the opposite. But this is the virtue of a great soul. He defines this very virtue in the quality that will endure. Now the ancient world said that Christian humility was a virtue altogether new. This indeed was the kind of conduct that to men looked crazy and foolish. Although this was of God.

We are to be oarsmen regardless of the currents that come.

V. WE ARE ASSISTANT ARCHITECTS ON A SPECIAL BUILDING SECTION

In Eph. 2:19 - the church is pictured as a building. And in the New Testament

Eph 2:19-21

it speaks of constructing this building, in which all of us are living stones.

In I Cor. 3:10, Paul speaks of himself as the architect who helps build upon Jesus the foundation. He admonishes the co-laborers. How they build upon the foundation. The servants of God are therefore not only living stones in the house of God but they are also construction supervisors.

The word episkopos is also very fitting here - it is a word that is translated bishop. And according to one scholar in his interpretation of the Greek word, that it means construction supervisor. The episkopos was responsible for supervising and reporting building progress as well as for checking all hinderances to construction.

In like manner, we are God's builders. Every one works on his special part of the building. And is building - the Deacon, the Evangelist, the Foreign Missionary, the Youth Work. We are all assistants to the great architect, Jesus Christ. And of course if the construction supervisor does his work in a sluggish lazy way then it endangers the entire group. Now the work foremen determines the spirit of all of his laborers. What a responsibility - for the leaders of God in the building of his Kingdom.

VI. WE ARE UNDER-SHEPHERDS OF THE GREAT SHEPHERD.

I Peter 5:2 - States feed the flock of God which is among you. Taking the oversight thereof not by constraint but willingly. Neither as being Lord over God's heritage but being examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory, that fadeth not away.

Now this is the wonderful experience that the servant of God is able to perform

his work in love. The great shepherd of the under shepherds. How the people of our day are hungry for life. How they search for security. How they need the leadership of under shepherds who will take the responsibility and feed the sheep.

VII. YOU ARE GOD'S SERVANTS AND MUST BE WILLING TO BE COVERED WITH DUST.

I discovered a new meaning in my reading the other day - of the word Deacon. And the literal meaning given as it often appears in the New Testament is - going through the dust."

Johann Sebastian Bach was invited from King Frederick the Great to his palace in Potsdam. He desired upon his arrival first of all to freshen himself. The King commanded, however, that the church musician be brought from the coach into the palace. Some of the members of the court smiled. When they say the dust covered musician. But with one rebuking glance, the King chided them for their cheap content.

Zinzendorf said, "Nothing is more beautiful than a dusty warrior."

What a fitting declaration that the word Deacon means going through the dust. That God's people do not object to any task that his servants are not ashamed to become even the most lowly brother, in the ministry of this world. He will become a companion for those in misery. He may help one and encourage another on the way of faith. As a servant, his first concern should be for the man in the dust - a physical and spiritual need. And such a concern downward is a mark of nobility in God's sight. In fact, (this is God's favorite direction.) That we should go to the out-cast, to those in need.

A Deacon should respect even the most lowly as an individual as a worthy candidate for individual life.

Bodelschwingh once received a visit from a government minister. And suddenly as they were walking on the street, he saw a brother on the other side and he hurried over and he threw his arms around him. And then he returned to the government minister and he said, Mr. Pastor, do you know for sure that this strange man has no lice. There upon, Bodelschwingh replied, Mr. Minister - one lice from the coat of this brother is worth more in God's eyes than the medal on your chest. Now the true servants of God are willing to be covered with dust of their labors for the Lord.

VIII. AS A SERVANT, YOU ARE GOD'S REPRESENTATIVE

I Peter 2:9 admonishes to proclaim the praises of Christ. This does not mean that we serve him only by word of mouth.

Everything about us should proclaim and represent love of Christ. People today are weary of talk and notice rather the walk and life of the person who is a leader in a church. We need to be living examples of faith.

The exalted position of the servants of God must demonstrate their spirituality.

Our failures must not dim the picture of God's great expectations. We are to be as Jesus said, to the Glory of God - salt and light. Psalm 34:3. Oh magnify the Lord with me. Let us exalt his name together.

Now since so many people today no longer attend churches, and since there is a

large population that has never heard a Gospel message - how shall they learn what faith is. How will they ever hear the Gospel if they do not see and hear about your faith. In this troubled world, where we live, and where they live - we must stick to our high calling in Christ Jesus. Because every man has to give an account as a steward of the mysteries of God.

Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.

Zinzendorf said, our joy until we die -- is to win men for the Lord.

Now if the last part of our text is to be fulfilled in your life, and you are to be found faithful, there must be an element of great faith in your own soul.

✓ By faith, Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter - choosing rather to suffer the afflictions of the people of God. He refused the life of luxury to take up poverty. He refused ease and chose hardship. He refused the throne to enjoy the praises of people - to go out to an unappreciative mass as a leader and a servant. The choice was the most daring and adventurous, and self-sacrificing experience. And as Moses passed through the gates of the palace, with its glorious structure, and then to go and live and dwell and think of those in the dark reed huts where the slaves dwelt - it was certainly heroic faith. And if you are going to be a leader, you must have heroic faith.

✓ A young man named Borden - a Chicago millionaire chose appointment as a foreign missionary to a far away land rather than the bright lights, fast automobiles, and fast society in his home land.

✓ Miss Levering, of Baltimore, born in the lap of luxury - reared in the best

culture, many opportunities - turned her back on all of the world's ways and went to China as a missionary. There are those who say she has buried herself, and there are others who say if buried, there will be one day a glorious resurrection. But there is nothing but faith that can inspire you.

Faith in God. Faith in God's work. Faith in God's Word. And faith in yourself about the possibilities of leading for him.

Now remember Moses had many things blocking his pathway. There was the pleasures of sin, the treasures of Egypt, and the dangers of death. All three of these stood in his way. But faith can overcome all of these and the faith of Moses had been implanted in his heart by his mother who served as his nurse. Many men today have become great - even though they may have had an unworthy father - but they have had or maybe have not had a worthy mother. But the choice has been made by faith. And it was the call of a job that needed to be done that inspired Moses to take up the leadership of his people.

Col. W. S. Crittendon was condemned to die in Cuba. And when ordered to kneel before the firing squad, he answered "A soldier kneels only to God." And stood erect.

Gabriel Petite, a brave Belgium girl, being led out to execution by the Germans was about to have a hood placed over her eyes when she refused it saying - I want the world to know how a Belgium girl can die for her country.

A soldier of the cross kneels only to God Almighty. Now if you, as a leader, in your church - will take this same stand, then you will make no choice or no decision or step in your conscience that is not born of faith and nurtured of God's Holy Spirit. It will have his approval.