

AN IDEAL DEACON

Acts 6:1-8, I Timothy 3:8-13

There were only two scriptural officers in New Testament churches; namely, pastors and deacons. Of course, the pastors were the recognized leaders. They were the God-called undershepherds. By example they were to be Christlike; in their ministry they were to be sacrificial.

Pastors though, however capable, could not attend to the many duties thrust upon them. Because the church members demanded impossible tasks of the early pastors, an emergency arose which brought about the origin of the office of deacon.

The two passages in God's Word which deal most directly with the deacons are Acts 6:1-8 and I Timothy 3:8-13. The first reference speaks of the origin of the deaconship and tells the situation and circumstances under which this high office came into being. The second passage gives the scriptural requirements of deacons, and the verses go into detail to describe the high prerequisites that must be met for God to be pleased with the men who are selected for this important office.

Preachers who have faced their tasks seriously have always been a busy group. Their manifold duties have been so pressing that neither time nor physical strength would permit their doing all their congregations have expected of them, or all that they have wanted to do. Out of this unending responsibility came the establishment of the office of deacon.

In the first church at Jerusalem new duties and responsibilities arose that overtaxed the time and the strength of the apostles. There was a strong tendency to draw the Lord's ministers away from their main task. With adequate material resources the apostles could have spent all of their time in wisely administering them for the benefit of the needy. The apostles could not attend to everything, and neither can the preachers do so today. If this work of distributing food and serving tables was to be done by the apostles, it had to be at the expense of their preaching, for these tasks would have forced them to neglect the weightier matters of prayer and proclaiming the Word. They could not do both efficiently. What must they do?

Under the pressure of need and the leadership of the Holy Spirit, they recognized the necessity of the division of labor. They knew that their major task was prayer and the ministry of the Word. They were unwilling to devote their time and energies to secondary matters. So, the apostles called the members of the church together, and suggested to them that it was not common sense for them to become waiters when people needed the Word of God, and recommended to them that something be done to provide the necessary help. One can almost hear the apostles saying something like this, "Look here, we have got to keep busy studying and preaching the Word of God. These widows are coming to us and saying, 'We are not getting our share.' Their relatives, friends, and sympathizers are very unhappy also. Here is the way to settle this. Let us appoint seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom you may select, and turn this business over to them." The church concurred and approved their recommendation, thus relieving the apostles of serving meals and enabling them to major on preaching. This plan for dealing with the emergency then at hand worked so well that it gradually and finally resulted in the office

of deacon. The first seven men who were chosen were "full of faith and power," and they set a wonderfully high standard for all the men who would follow them in this noble office. Through the intervening centuries many godly men have served their Lord faithfully in their respective churches in the capacity of deacons.

The deaconship involves the idea of service. It is distinctly a call to serve. Deacons are elected with a view to service. The office is not just a post of honor, but it is a medium of service. If any deacon conceives of his office as a place of personal honor and authority, he has taken the first step toward making himself disagreeable to his co-laborers and a hinderer of the work of the Lord in his church. Unfortunately the usefulness of some men has been ruined because they interpreted their ordination to the deaconship as an elevation to the position of church boss. How honorable a deacon may become depends on the attitude, spirit, and manner in which he does his work. The esteem in which he will be held and the extent of his influence will be determined by him. His only authority is that of influence, except as the church may authorize him to do something. Authority for decisions rests with the church, and never with the deacons apart from the church.

I heartily congratulate you brethren upon your election to this position of trust, responsibility, and opportunity. I would also express the earnest hope that while you serve in this capacity you will be loyal to Christ and faithful in the services of your church.

I. What A Deacon Should Be.

1. A man of Christian character.
He must be a Christian, having had an experience of grace and been saved.
2. A man of good reputation.
"Men of honest report." He must have an unblemished reputation among church members and others. He must have a good reputation as well as character. His conduct must be such as to command respect.
3. A man of genuine piety.
"Full of the Holy Spirit." He must be a man of prayer --- in secret, at home, and in church. He should avail himself of the spiritual enrichment afforded in the mid-week prayer service.
4. A man of wisdom.
"Full of wisdom." This does not mean that he has to be a literary man, or a college graduate, but he must have good common sense. He must be filled with that divine wisdom which gives a peculiar insight and understanding. Wisdom is the ability to know and to do what is right. Deacons are chosen to settle problems, and not to create them. Wisdom is required in settling problems. Dealing with people is no simple or easy matter. You can't deal with them in church as you do elsewhere.
5. A man of sound judgment.
He will need gumption as well as grace. He will need the ability to see a proposition from all angles. He will need the ability to understand conditions, meet emergencies and solve problems. Tendency is to be interested in one thing to the exclusion of the entire program of the church. It is so easy for one to think that his pet project is the most important.
6. A man of exemplary deportment.
He will be obligated to set a worthy example for other church members.

His influence will be multiplied in his official position.

(1) Serious-minded.

"Be grave." "Grave" signified gravity or weight. A deacon should be a man who counts; whose support of a cause will be a distinct asset. He should be serious-minded and not frivolous.

(2) Truthful.

"Not double tongued." He must not say one thing and mean another. He must say what he means and mean what he says. He must not be two-faced.

(3) Sober.

"Not given to much wine." He must be a total abstainer if he is going to represent and lead a church. Intemperance always brings disgrace on a church.

(4) Not covetous.

"Not greedy of filthy lucre." Stinginess disqualifies a man for a deacon. It is right to make money in the proper manner and use it for God's glory, but one should never can all that he gets. Covetousness is a deliberate crime, and no criminal should be a deacon.

(5) Orthodox.

"Holding the mystery of faith in a pure conscience." He must believe right or he cannot live right and do right. He should be rooted and grounded in the faith.

(6) Not a polygamist.

"Husband of one wife." That does not mean that he has to have a wife, but that he must not have more than one. Most husbands are convinced that one is a plenty.

(7) Blameless.

"Blameless." A preacher told about a letter which he received from his mother. The letter was filled with misspelled words and grammatical errors. It was very defective but blameless, said he, because she did the best she could. Is that not the meaning?

7. A man of tact.

This means that he will use sanctified common sense in dealing with the various problems that will arise, such as trouble among members, dissatisfaction with the pastor, and the work of young people.

8. A man of vision.

A deacon should take a long look into the future and plan a challenging program. He should be progressive and aggressive.

II. What A Deacon Should Do.

1. Grow as a Christian.

He should ever strive to be an informed churchman.

2. Help fill the church pews.

The pastor should fill the pulpit and the deacons should help to fill the pews.

3. Care for the sick and needy.

He should do more than just call the pastor and tell him about such cases.

4. Enlist the unenlisted.
5. Greet visitors.
6. Help create a good fellowship.
7. Look after the church finances.
8. Give some time to the church.
9. Do his very best.
He should let his motto be: "I magnify my office." He should magnify his office for his own sake, for the sake of others, for the sake of his church and for the sake of Christ.

III. What A Faithful Deacon's Reward Will Be.

1. The consciousness of a task well done.
2. The appreciation of his pastor and people.
3. Joy over helpful service rendered.
4. The blessings of the Lord upon him.
5. A crown of glory.