

A TRUSTWORTHY DEACON

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

Marvelous was the growth of the first church at Jerusalem. It enjoyed one victory after another, and thousands were added to its membership. With the rapidly growing membership of the church, resulting from the new impetus received at Pentecost, there came the necessity for a larger program. There were so many poor people in the membership of that church that organized charity had to be conducted on a large scale. It seems that this larger program was first undertaken by the apostles themselves, but with the increasing opportunity for preaching the gospel, and the corresponding drain upon their energies, the twelve faced the necessity of either curtailing their activities as ministers of the Word or distributing the work and dividing the responsibilities.

In the membership of the first church were both Palestinian and foreign or Greek-speaking Jews. In the distribution of food and supplies the widows of the foreign or Greek-speaking Jews were neglected, or at least that was the complaint and accusation of the Hellenists. Jealousy soon developed between the Hebrew and Grecian beneficiaries of the church. A real church "fuss" was in the making, and it grew out of money matters. That a state of unrest had developed among the members of the church, and that the atmosphere was tense, does not require a vivid imagination to see. The spirit that had developed within the church would ere long have disrupted the unity, depleted the energy and undermined the influence of the young and rapidly growing organization. The first great problem of the church came from within, the place from whence most church difficulties come.

In the great company of believers constituting the first church at Jerusalem, new duties and responsibilities arose that overtaxed the time and strength of the Apostles. From these early times the record shows there was a strong tendency to draw the ministers of God away from their main task. The Apostles heard the cry of the poor and helpless and had a desire to help them. With adequate material resources they could have spent all their time in wisely administering them for the benefit of the needy. But, if this important and needed work was to be done by the Apostles, it had to be at the expense of their preaching. They could no longer do both efficiently. What must they do?

The Apostles were unwilling to give so much of their time to the distribution of food or the serving of tables, thereby forcing themselves to neglect the weightier matters of prayer and preaching. Under the pressure of need and the leadership of the Holy Spirit, they recognized the necessity for the division of labor. They knew that their first and major business was prayer and the ministry of the Word. They were unwilling to be devoting their time and energies to secondary matters. What pastor of any sizable church today does not feel the strain upon his nerves, the tax upon his time and the drain upon his energies, which are made by the popular demand that he "serve tables"? Somebody recently made the charge that we do not have any great preachers such as lived in other generations. If the charge is justified, let me ask, How can any man, regardless of how well he may be equipped, become a great preacher and "serve tables"? One thing is sure, the Apostles dared not try.

Needing helpers to relieve them of the burden and details of serving tables or feeding the multitude, in order that they might be free to give themselves to the prayerful study and the public ministry of the Word, the Apostles called the members of the church together and recommended to them that something be done to provide the necessary help. One can almost hear the Apostles saying, "Look here, we have got to keep busy preaching the Word. These widows are coming to us and saying, 'We are not getting our share.' Their 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.

It is quite likely that this arrangement was intended to be purely local and temporary, dealing only with the emergency then at hand, but the plan is assumed to have worked so well that it gradually became more permanent in its nature and finally resulted in the creation of the office of deacon. The selection of deacons certainly dates back to New Testament times and has been a great blessing to a large number of men who have been set apart to the office. Through godly deacons the churches have been greatly blessed, and the cause of Christ has been advanced.

Any church must have some faithful, thoughtful, trustworthy, Spirit-led Christians to work with the pastor if it is to meet the needs of the people for whose welfare it is responsible. You, who are about to be ordained as deacons, have been elected by this church for that important task. I heartily congratulate each of you upon your election to this office. You are not being set aside for some favored position that will bring you a special privilege. Your election is simply and distinctly a call to serve. Your office is not a post of honor but a medium of service. You are not given a special honor which is detached from all responsibility. You are now about to be inaugurated into a highly responsible service for God, your church and your fellow men. We hope that your ordination will be a significant event in your life and in the life of our church.

I. What He 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.
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.
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" signifies 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 be married, but that he must not have more than one wife. 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 He 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 His 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.