

Deacons – Ministers of Mercy

The New Year brings with it a concerted effort to develop a strong base of leadership here at Harvest.

- Over the last 3 years we have made attempts to train and maintain strong leaders.
- This year we will be spending 9 months training prospective elders for future service.
- Our Deacons will undergo 12 months of training this year. And we will be asking YOU to nominate individuals to serve as deacons over the next 3 weeks.

Over the past 3 decades with the emergence of the seeker friendly, mega church elder boards have grown to resemble corporate boards. Their focus is more on marketing than the Gospel.

- In an attempt to win the world the church has become more and more like the world.
- Pastors resemble corporate CEO's and many churches are looking for the "Steve Jobs" of Ministry who will make their church the "Apple" of God's eye. (catch the pun)

This morning we hope to gain understanding and develop a biblical perspective on leadership. Biblical Leadership in the New Testament church is described in such a way as to represent the character and nature of God himself.

- Jesus revealed God as our faithful Father,
- In describing the qualifications of an elder Paul told Timothy (1 Tim 3:4) an *Elder must manage his own household well*, (GOOD FATHER) *with all dignity keeping his children submissive, 5 for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?*

The Psalmist describes God as a Good Shepherd, feeding and caring for his flock. Psalm 23:1 *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. 3 He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

- The Lord Jesus identified himself as the Good Shepherd:
John 10:11 *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*
- Peter exhorts church elders to shepherd the flock of God:

1 Peter 5: 1 *So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;*

3 *not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.*

4 *And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.*

- In the weeks to come we will look more closely at the role of Elder but this morning we are going to focus on the role of a deacon in the New Testament church:

New Testament Deacons are called to be a living expression of the MERCY of God within the local church. BEGIN with the character of God: God is merciful!

- "O give thanks unto the Lord: for He is good, for His mercy endures forever" (NKJV Ps. 136:1)

- His mercy is "great" (1 Kings 3:6), "plenteous" (Ps. 86:5), "tender" (Luke 1:78), "abundant" (1 Pet. 1:3); it is "from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him" (Ps. 103:17).

In Exodus 34 when God allowed all of his goodness to pass before Moses, He secured Moses in the cleft of a rock and when the Lord had passed in the afterglow of his glorious presence He declared. Ex 34:6 **The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,**

- Please take note of the preeminent place of MERCY on the list.

The Hebrew word for "MERCY" (*rachamim*) is an emotionally loaded word. Literally it stands for the bowels; (FOR many of us, bowels has been emotionally charged word lately)

Bowels = the seat of emotion at the very heart of a man.

(*rachamim*) is a plural form of *rechem*, which is a mother's womb.

- With this Hebrew word in mind, Mercy is an expression of love which is deeply felt, like the affection of a mother for her little child (Isaiah 49:15), the tenderness of a father for his offspring (Psalm 103:13), **13 As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.**

The story is told of:

A mother once approached Napoleon seeking a pardon for her son. The emperor replied that the young man had committed a certain offense and justice demanded death.

"*But I don't ask for justice,*" the mother explained. "*I plead for mercy.*"

"*But your son does not deserve mercy,*" Napoleon replied.

"*Sir,*" the woman cried, "*it would not be mercy if he deserved it, and mercy is all I ask for.*"

"*Well, then,*" the emperor said, "*I will have mercy.*" And he spared the woman's son.

- Mercy in the biblical sense is much more than simply one aspect of God's love. Mercy is an important part of God's very nature.

Psalm 103: 7 **He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.** 8 **The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.** 9 **He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever.** 10 **He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.**

Wayne Grudem – "God's mercy, grace and patience may be seen as three separate attributes or as specific aspects of God's goodness. The definitions given here show those attributes as special examples of God's goodness when it is used for the benefit of specific classes of people.

- God's mercy is God's goodness toward those in misery or distress.
- God's grace is God's goodness toward those who deserve only punishment.
- God's patience is God's goodness in withholding of punishment toward those who sin for an extended period of time.

These 3 characteristics of God's goodness can be seen together in Exodus 34:

Ex 34:6 **The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,**

Consider the Mercy of God as it is extended to men who are enslaved to sin: They have no ability in themselves to break free from the bonds of iniquity and continuing in that corrupt condition they will be cast forever into the burning wrath of God. BUT GOD:

Ephesians 2:4 **But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—**

- He made US alive through the Death of Jesus Christ. Consider this illustration:

Bryan Chapell tells this story that happened in his hometown: Two brothers were playing on the sandbanks by the river. One ran after another up a large mound of sand. Unfortunately, the mound was not solid, and their weight caused them to sink in quickly.

When the boys did not return home for dinner, the family and neighbors organized a search. They found the younger brother unconscious, with his head and shoulders sticking out above the sand. When they cleared the sand to his waist, he awakened. The searchers asked, "Where is your brother?"

The child replied, "I'm standing on his shoulders"

With the sacrifice of his own life, the older brother lifted the younger to safety.

The sacrificial love of the older brother literally served as a foundation for the younger brother's life.

- So Jesus Christ has become the chief cornerstone, the ROCK of our salvation and with our feet firmly established on his merciful sacrifice we have everlasting life.

Wayne Grudem said: Mercy is God's goodness toward those in misery or distress, let's remember the two Blind men in the Gospel of Matthew who followed after the Lord Jesus.:

Matthew 9: 27 **And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, "Have mercy on us, Son of David."**

- In their desperate condition they cried out for mercy.

As Believers, we are instructed to hold out to others the same mercy that we ourselves have received from God:

2 Corinthians 1: 3 **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.**

- All who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, all who have been born again by the Spirit of God ARE in the process of being transformed into the image of God. (2 Cor 3:18)
- New Testament Deacons are called to be an active expression of God's mercy within the local church: Faithfully caring for the brothers and sisters who are in great need.

The office came into being at a time when certain widows in the church were going hungry. They had been overlooked in the distribution of the church's benevolence.

Background: In first century Israel the temple treasury provided sustenance for the widows of the land.

- There was no social security, no welfare system, no food stamps; the Levites oversaw the distribution of necessary resources for widows who had no means of support.

When the church of Jesus Christ became a separate entity from the Jewish Temple, the care for the believing widows became the responsibility of the Apostles.

- It wasn't long before the management of the church's benevolence became overwhelming for the Apostles. They needed help with the distribution of resources

Acts 6: 1 Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

2 And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. 3 Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.

- "Of Good Repute" Men who have a good reputation within the community, regarded as men of integrity. Men whose character was well known and fair.
- Paul spells out the character of a Deacon for us in his First Letter to Timothy:

1 Timothy 3:8 Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. 9 They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.

- "Full of the Spirit" men whose lives displayed the obvious influence of the Holy Ghost.
 - What does that look like? Ephesians 5 helps us understand:

Ephesians 5: 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

- This may be another way of describing a life that displays the fruit of the Spirit;

Galatians 5: 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Honestly these attributes should be growing in EVERY BELIEVER,

- After all we are ALL being transformed into the image of Christ.
- BUT Elders and Deacons should be EXAMPLES to the church of a transformed life.
- NOT complete or perfect by any means BUT certainly leading the way on the right path.

The last attribute LUKE mention in ACTS 6 is WISDOM

Filled with the Holy Spirit "And Wisdom" Prudence, or skill, to make a wise and equitable distribution of the church's resources.

- Wisdom necessary to be good stewards of the Lord's resources.

The Elders are giving you the same exhortation that the Apostles gave the church in Acts 6:3 **pick out from among you: men / women of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.**

- This week PRAY and look, carefully consider who the Lord might have serve in the role of Deacon.
- Next 2 weeks there will be nomination slips in your bulletin.
- Let's make a concerted effort to PRAY this week for the leaders of the church, asking the Lord to ADD qualified men and women to their numbers that they might labor together for the glory of God and the building of His kingdom.