

**1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3: 8; “Deacons, A Distinct Office”, Sermons # 37 and 38 combined into one, in the series – “To Honor God in the church”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2014, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

I want to attempt to begin to set forth to you this afternoon the teaching of the Apostle Paul on the office of a deacon. There are only 2 offices in the local church, if we hold to biblical truth. And each is a distinct office from the other. Contrary to what some have taught, deacons are not junior elders, or elders-waiting, or “deacons-come-elders” as a man from Great Britain once told me as he was describing their church. Deacons are differentiated from elders, not in the area of character qualifications, but in the area of serving. Both deacons and elders are servants. Both are ministering on behalf of Christ, and to the church. All the same character qualities which are required of the Elder must, it says here, be seen in the Deacon. This is what the word, “likewise” means. The only difference in qualifications between Elder and Deacon is in the requirement for an elder to have an aptness to teach. All Christians are called to be servants of Christ, and the servants of each other, in the church. But not all Christians are raised up to become deacons. All Christians minister to Christ and to the poor and needy in the local church; but not all are officially designated to this service by the church. I want to trace the roots and the development of this office this afternoon, to see the distinct difference in the function of the offices of elder and deacon. And I want also to go into the first of the qualifications for a man to become a deacon. I want us to see 1<sup>st</sup> of all – That the office of deacon grew out of a need to serve tables. Then 2<sup>nd</sup> – That the office of deacon grew out of a need to protect and relieve the overseers (the shepherds of Christ’s flock) from the kind of service that would hinder their preaching of the Word of God and prayers. And 3<sup>rd</sup> - I want you to better understand why those who are deacons must be reverent.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – The office of deacon grew out of a need to serve tables.**

Turn with me over to Acts Chapter 6, and we will look at verses 1-7. “Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.” “Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.’” “Therefore brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” “And the saying pleased the whole multitude” “And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.” “Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.”

As we read these words, we need to understand that the situation was this. Originally the gospel went to the Jews first. And the needs of Hebrew widows of believing members in the church, were cared for by the Hebrew Christians. But then the gospel spread to the Greeks, and some of them also had widows who were legitimately needy, and it appears that they were being neglected in the daily distribution of food and other necessities. They were saying in effect – “Aren’t we Greek Christians not a part of this church?” “Then does it not seem unloving and unfair to neglect our widows in the daily distribution of food?” Perhaps the Hebrew Christians possibly thought of this extra ministry as something the Greeks could do for themselves if they wanted. But this was a complaint that reached the ears of the 12 apostles. The Apostles did not choose to act simply on their own authority, but they wisely summoned the multitude of disciples to tell them what they intended should be done. It should also be noted that the need for deacons came about

as the number of disciples was multiplying. There were a multitude of disciples and it required a deliberate designation of the kind of men who were needed and a definition of the task assigned.

And so, to quell all of the dissatisfaction of the parties involved, it was decided that seven men of good reputation would be sought for and chosen from among the brethren. They would then officially be appointed to this task of serving tables by the apostles. They would serve the tables and administrate the distribution of food and other necessities to all of the needy widows of both the Hebrews and the Hellenists. Notice that they chose their seven best men to serve. Two of these men at least, were also gifted preachers, as well as their being described as being full of the Spirit. Brethren, this should show us how important a thing it is, that the church have deacons. There are many needs that will come to light amongst us as the years go by; as we continue on together as a church. And it seems apparent from these qualifications that the kingdom of God will not advance strongly unless these are godly men raised up from among ourselves, who are willing to be ministers of mercy; men who are willing to wait tables, men who are willing to help orphans, and others who need help and instruction in very basic and practical ways. The Apostle Paul, in Acts 20:35 says, "I have shown you in every way by laboring like this, that you must support the weak." "And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" "And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all." This is one of the primary ways that Christ's kingdom is advanced; by helping the weak.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – The office of deacon grew out of a need to protect and relieve the overseers (the shepherds) of Christ's flock from the kind of service that would hinder their ministry of prayer and the preaching of the Word of God.**

Verse 4 of Acts 6 says: "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." It is not as though that Apostles, or pastor-teachers could not serve tables; as though it was something below them, or the dignity of their office. No, it was not that. It was that if they were to do so, something which they were officially called to, by God, would be neglected. It would not be desirable to do that, as they put it in verse 2 – "to leave the word of God". Their officially designated task, as called shepherds of Christ's Church, His flock, is found in here in this verse; that is, the giving of themselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word. It is these particular activities which are essential for elders to engage in, if they are to be faithful pastors and under-shepherds of Christ. I can think of no better description of the pastoral ministry than this; praying and preaching. If these are neglected in favor of serving tables, in favor of serving in relation to the legitimate needs which people in the church have, then the cause of Christ and truth will fall down.

Let us understand that God does use means in the accomplishment of His ends; of seeing His elect people saved, and the church built up in truth. And the way that God has ordained that Christ's churches will grow in holiness and righteousness, and in their corporate witness, is found in the elders and the deacons maintaining these priorities. If it is true that a minister must be able to give himself undistractedly to these things, then all of the deacons of the local church must study to make this possible by their deliberately going about to address the legitimate needs of the membership of the church. All the while that the deacons are doing this, they will also be attempting to share and to live out the truth of the Word of God before those whom they are ministering to; ministering spiritually and personally the truth of the word of God to those who have those needs. What a good differentiation of service this is! The whole multitude was pleased with this saying. And so they chose the seven, and they set them before the Apostles, and the Apostles prayed for them, and for their future ministry. They officially set them apart to this office, and this service, by laying hands on them. And do you see what a beautiful and wonderful outcome there was? The Word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith. Deacons are different from Elders in their service, but both are serving Christ together in the way that the Lord designates.

### **Now 3rd - Let us understand why those who are deacons must be reverent men.**

It says here in verse 8 - "Likewise deacons must be reverent..." The New American Standard has the word translated - "men of dignity". The King James says: "Likewise, must the deacons be grave". The New International Version at this point gives a very good translation: "Worthy of respect". Let us take it from that vantage point. What does it mean for these men who are being considered for this office, to be "worthy of respect"? Well, positively, in Acts Chapter 6, verse 3, we see that the seven men who were to be chosen by the whole congregation were to be men "of a good reputation". Paul's use of the words, "reverent" and "worthy of respect" correspond with the Apostle's qualification here of having a good reputation. They were to be men, as Alexander Strauch says, "who were well known and well-spoken of, because of their good character and skills." "Men of good character, certified by public testimony," another commentator says. In other words men of good character are men who reverence God; they fear God more than men. We see this same kind of direction given to Moses by his father-in-law Jethro when he saw Moses burdened down with judging the people from morning until evening. He says in Exodus 18: 21 - "Moreover, you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness, and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens." And also in Deuteronomy 1: 13, "Choose wise, understanding, knowledgeable men from among your tribes and I will make them heads over you."

It is evident from Acts 6 that the people of the congregation themselves were to be on the lookout for such men to represent the church as ministers of mercy; men who were known to be able and skilled men. Proverbs 18: 16 says, "A man's gift makes room for him, and brings him before great men." Truly, in order to be able to help others, you must be able, and skilled, yourself. I myself believe that a man who is to be a deacon must be practically-minded in the particular way of thinking of people and their needs. He should always be asking himself these kind of questions - How can this good work that I wish to do, be done to the glory of God? How can this person who I am thinking about be truly helped? How may Christ be seen and the gospel be made known through what I intend to do for the church and for others? It is true, that a man who is to become a deacon will need to be a man who will be diligent to see that things will get done around the church; but he is also a person who is deeply interested in the welfare of people. He inquires, he watches, he evaluates in a righteous and loving way, the needs of each and every person in the congregation. The congregation takes notice of him too, and they are impressed with the Biblical wisdom that he brings to every situation that he is in. They see the fruit of the Spirit manifest in his words and actions. They know that he is not going to run over people or manipulate them in order to get things done. They know that he will be very deliberate in going about to get things done, but they also see that he is thoughtful and considerate in the way that he does his work. Let it be truly considered by each of us; a man who is filled with the Holy Spirit has learned the importance of prayer and humility. He knows that God will have to be sought to see good things come to pass in the life of the church. He knows that God should be frequently sought so that these good things will be lastingly established.

Negatively, verse 8 of our text says that men who are being considered for the office of deacon, should not be men who are double-tongued, given to much wine, or greedy for money. These are character sins which are listed here, and they can destroy a man's respectability and his usefulness. We might say that each one of these sins comes about because of a lack of self-control and self-watchfulness. Men who become deacons must be full of the Spirit; not full of self. They must not be double-tongued men, saying one thing to the pastor and another thing to the congregation. The man who would do a good work as a deacon will not be a man who vacillates in his opinions, or plays both ends against the middle. He is sincere and straightforward in his speaking with people. He is not a man who will allow misunderstandings to continue, or differences between people in the church to be maintained, by his saying two different things to some in order to gain the approval of others. He understand how difficult a thing it is to tame the tongue. Turn with me over

to James 3: 7-12. "For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind." "But no man can tame the tongue." "It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." "With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God." "Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing." "My brethren, these things ought not to be so." "Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?" "Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs?" "Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh."

You can see from these verses that the tongue cannot be tamed unless its owner has grace working in his heart, and self-control in his use of his mouth. It is possible sometimes for a man to be a person who blesses God at church, but at home, or when he may be around his more worldly buddies, he curses men who have been made in the likeness of God. This kind of a man should not be made a deacon in the church. But it says here, that a spring if it is to be useful to refresh and satisfy and quench the thirst of people, does not send forth both fresh and bitter water from the same opening. Neither does a fig tree bear olives or a grapevine bear figs. Let each of us therefore, resolve by the grace of God, not to be double-minded or double-tongued people.

Neither are men who are given to much wine to be considered for the diaconate. In Ephesians 5, verse 17 Paul says: "Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is." "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit." To dissipate is to scatter, or to squander; to have your strength and focus of your energy drained off. If a man drinks much wine, he will forget the law and pervert the justice of the afflicted, it says in Proverbs 31: 5. It is not for kings to drink wine, and it is not for deacons to drink much wine. A person like that will not be able to plead the cause of the poor and the needy. Let not a man who is a deacon or a man who would be a deacon, abuse wine or any other alcoholic beverage and thus damage his testimony and his service to God and the church.

And finally, we should note, that deacons are men that are not greedy for money. Unfortunately, as you study the history of the church, you will come across some people who have liked having the position of financial responsibility so that they could secretly steal or misuse the funds under their supervision. Judas was the prime example of this. In John chapter 12, verses 3-8 we find him criticizing Mary's loving and costly act of taking the pound of costly oil of spikenard, breaking it, and pouring it on Jesus' feet and wiping His feet with her hair. He said, "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" John's comment on this was: "This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it." A man who is greedy for money wants the money for selfish purposes, and yet he may cover it up by a pretended concern for the poor. Deacons are those who are responsible to handle other people's gifts of money. And you can see that there would be a real problem in the church if a man is made a deacon whose financial integrity was not carefully examined. A man who is being considered for the office of deacon must be willing to be examined to see if his character is free from the love of money, as Hebrews 13: 5 says. And he will often examine himself. And when examined, he will be a man who others can see, is content with such things as he has. Let me ask in closing: Are you content with Christ and what He give you in grace and truth? For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."