

“The Office of Deacon”  
Acts 6:1-7; 1 Timothy 3:8-13  
(Preached at Trinity, April 19, 2009)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. The office of deacon is greatly misunderstood in churches today. Some have elevated the deacons to the chief administrators in the church. Others have diminished the office to the point of irrelevance. I recently had a discussion about the office of deacon with a group of pastors from churches in our area. I was shocked how little these men knew about New Testament deacons. One pastor didn't have deacons in his church at all claiming that they've caused too many problems. None of the pastors could give reason for their existence.
  2. As our church considers the addition of another deacon to the ministry of our church I think it is important that we have a solid understanding on the subject. As you know, I greatly resist topical preaching but at times I think a pastor needs to address particular topics essential to the building up of the congregation.
  3. This morning I want to look at the office of deacon from three different angles.
    - The office in the early church.
    - The qualifications for the men entering this office.
    - The function of the deacons in our church.
- I. The issue in the early church was that of discord among members of the church
- A. The early church took seriously the matter of caring for its members
    1. In **Acts 2** we read that members sold property to help provide for those who had lost their livelihood for the sake of Christ  
**Acts 2:45** – “And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all *men*, as every man had need.”
    2. Widows were another group under the care of the church
      - a. There was no life insurance at this time
      - b. Some of these widows were abandoned by their families because they had abandoned Judaism.
  - B. A schism had developed among the Hebrew and the Grecian widows  
**Acts 6:1** – “And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations.”
    1. There were two primary languages spoken in Jerusalem  
Aramaic which was a form of classical Hebrew spoken mainly by the Jews.  
Greek, which was the dominant language of that day – a product of Alexander the Great's conquests.
    2. Both groups were most likely Jews. The Grecian or Hellenist Jews had returned to Jerusalem where God added them to the church.

3. This difference in language resulted in the first source of division within the church. This division soon led to disruption.
  4. The Greek speaking Jews felt their widows felt were not receiving the same care as the Hebrews.
- C. The Apostles knew this disunity would gnaw at the very heart of the church. The church is only strong when there is unity in Christ. The church is only strong when each member considers the wellbeing of the whole before his personal needs.
- Philippians 2:3** – "*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. <sup>4</sup>Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.*"
1. The apostles knew that for the good of the church this situation had to be rectified quickly.
  2. They could oversee the administration of the benevolence personally. They certainly had the skill for this. There was a problem with this, though. It would take them away from their chief work – the ministry of the Word.
- Acts 6:2** – "It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables."
- D. Observe the procedure
1. First, their selection of deacons was based upon need. There is no requirement for a specific number of deacons in our church. Our additions of deacons in our own church must be based upon need.
  2. Second, the deacons were chosen by the church. They weren't appointed. Deacons are added to our church by a vote of the church.
  3. Third, the deacons were chosen under the oversight and authority of the apostles. The pastors examine the suitability of the men recommended by the membership.
- Acts 6:6** – "Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid *their* hands on them."

## II. The qualifications

- A. The prospective deacons were to be carefully examined  
The Apostles gave three qualifications
- Acts 6:3** – "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business."
1. Of honest report – this speaks of his reputation  
An office bearer in the church of Christ must be a leader
    - a. This means others should be able to follow his example
    - b. He must be faithful in attendance, in giving, in leading his family.
    - c. He must demonstrate an active concern for the wellbeing of the church.
  2. Full of the Holy Ghost – he will be a spiritual man, loves the things of God, led by the Spirit of God.
  3. Full of Wisdom – he has discernment
- B. Paul gives further qualifications in **1 Timothy 3:8-13**
1. "Grave" - σεμνός – it speaks of an honorable character.

- a. The Deacon should be serious minded
- b. Not morbid or void of personality – but dead serious about the things of God and the wellbeing of the church
2. “Not double-tongued” - δῖλογος - doubletongued - saying one thing with one person another with another (with the intent to deceive)
  - a. He has careful control of his tongue.
  - b. He is not a flatterer
  - c. He does not cause division by what he says – he is not a gossip
  - d. A Deacon’s speech must never be hypocritical but characterized by honesty, integrity, consistency – his yea is yea and his nay is nay
3. “Not given to much wine”
  - a. The issue is not total abstinence but we must understand the difference between the 21st century American and the person in Paul’s day.
  - b. Their wine for consumption as a common beverage was largely water. Intoxication was strictly forbidden
  - c. The deacon is able to maintain strict self-control
4. “Not greedy of filthy lucre”
  - a. The Deacon must not be enslaved material things
  - b. Oversight over benevolence may include handling money – he must not be dominated by a love for money.
5. **Verse 9** – “Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience”
  - a. What is this “Mystery of the Faith?” It is the Gospel of Christ; the revelation of God given in Christ.
  - b. In other words, the deacon must be sound in his doctrine – he must have a firm hold on the true faith.
  - c. He must hold the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience – there must not be any hypocrisy  
In other words, his actions must be consistent with his profession
- C. **Verse 10** – “And let them also first be proved”
  1. We must take the ordination of a man to either the office of elder or deacon very seriously
  2. The deacon’s life has been one that has demonstrated these qualities. He has been tested to determine if this is so
- D. **Verse 11** – “Even so must their wives . . .”
  1. The wives of pastors and deacons are of great importance. A man cannot truly separate himself from his wife, nor a wife from her husband. The two become one flesh.
  2. I’ve often said the wife of a pastor will be his greatest asset or his worst curse. The same is true of a deacon.
  3. She must be “grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.” She must know discretion. She must carefully guard her tongue She must not be self-seeking always wanting her way
  4. This verse states that even a deacon’s wife must be above reproach

- E. **Verse 12** - “let the deacons be the husband of one wife”
1. As with the office of Pastor, the Deacon must be martially above reproach – that is, he must be a man who maintains a faithful, monogamous relationship with his wife = a “one woman man.” Just being married to the same woman does not mean you meet this qualification.
  2. The deacon’s family should be an example to other families. His children should be obedient and faithful

III. What do the deacons do? What is their purpose?

- A. The function of this office is left purposely vague
1. Not so with the office of Pastor – his function in the church is well described
  2. There are few passages dealing with the office of deacon. This has led some churches to see them as insignificant
  3. I think the office is left somewhat vague so that it can be ordered as to best fit the particular local church. We do have some clear principles to follow for the office.
  4. I’ll outline these for you and then describe the office at Trinity.
- B. First, let me clarify what the office of deacon is not.
1. It is not a ruling office.
    - a. This doesn’t mean deacons don’t have authority. They do have oversight over the functions of their office. They may enlist others in the church who will be answerable to them.
    - b. Christ has given the rule of the church to the pastors.
      - (1) Their titles describe their rule  
 ἐπίσκοπος – bishop – overseer – oversight of the church  
 πρεσβύτερος – elder – goes back to the elders of Israel  
 ποιμήν – pastor – feeds the church by teaching the Word  
 which carries with it authority
      - (2) Scripture describes them as rulers over the church  
**1 Timothy 5:17** – “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.”  
**1 Timothy 3:5** – “(For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) προϊστήμι – literally, to stand before  
**Hebrews 13:7** – “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of *their* conversation.”  
**Hebrews 13:17** – “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you.”
  2. Although it is not a ruling office, it is also not simply a building maintenance committee
    - a. There are high qualifications for this office

- b. A janitor doesn't need to be full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom,
- C. What is the nature of this office?  
The Bible defines three areas that define this office
1. First, it is an office of service – δῖάκονος – a servant
    - a. Both offices of pastor and deacon are offices of service.
      - (1) The pastors are to labor in the service (ministry) of the Word
      - (2) The deacons are to give themselves to serving the practical needs of the church. Service defines the office of deacon.
    - b. The deacons in Acts 6 were called to oversee the table service of the widows. The Bible often uses δῖάκονος to describe the supplying of material needs
 

**Matthew 4:11** - Angels came to supply the needs of Jesus in the wilderness.

**Matthew 8:15** – After Peter's mother-in-law was healed she rose to serve her guests.

**Luke 10:40** – Martha was busy serving from the kitchen

**Romans 15:25; 2 Corinthians 8:19** – Paul's collection of money for the saints was called a service (ministry).

**Philemon 1:13** – Paul wants to keep Onesimus with him so he can serve him in prison.
  2. Second, we find in particular that the deacons were placed in charge of benevolence – taking care of those in need.
  3. Third, we find the deacons dealing with issues of harmony in the church.
    - a. The Apostles knew that harmony was essential in the church
    - b. A high emphasis was placed upon the community of the saints  
Remember the description of the church at the very beginning  
**Acts 2:42** – “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”  
κοινωνία is at the very heart of the church
  4. Fourth, their primary function was to serve in such a way as to free the elders for their primary work – the ministry of the Word.
- IV. How does the office of deacon function at Trinity?
- A. Much of what the deacons do the congregation will never see
    1. This is also true of the office of pastor or elder
    2. The offices of the church work long and hard in the background and the congregation enjoys the benefits of Godly men working together for the welfare of the church.
  - B. The deacons serve to maintain the harmony of our congregation
    1. Paul described such a Spirit in Ephesians 4  
**Ephesians 4:1-3** – “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, <sup>2</sup> With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; <sup>3</sup> Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”
    2. Everyone in the church has an opinion

- a. Every opinion is important but every opinion is not of equal value to the church. The problem is we all think our opinions are the best.  
Deacons often deal with issues that the elders don't need to be involved in.
- b. In a family like a church sometimes a person will get his or her feelings hurt over some issue. This is what we see in **Acts 6**.  
Deacons often help to restore harmony.
- 3. The deacons help to promote and support the ministry of the Word.  
They are out and among the members – they help to inform the elders of particular needs or particular concerns
- C. They labor in the many practical needs of our church
  - 1. The deacons have oversight over our building
    - a. There are countless tasks in maintaining our facility – flowerbed, keeping the weeds out of the parking lot, maintenance issues.
    - b. Our members have a habit of approaching the pastor on building issues. It is actually the responsibility of the deacons.
  - 2. The deacons help in the preparation of the ordinances – preparing the bread and filling the cups. Filling and emptying the baptistery and setting up for this ordinance.
  - 3. Counting the offering and preparing the deposit
  - 4. Greeting and overseeing the needs of our visitors
- D. The deacons have oversight over benevolence needs
  - 1. Our first duty is to our congregation  
Deacons and Elder's wives can play a great role in looking to the needs of our ladies – organizing meals etc.
  - 2. They share in the ministry of visiting the sick.
  - 3. They help to oversee the benevolence needs in the community  
A.J. did a wonderful job leading and overseeing our hurricane relief after Katrina.
- E. The deacons serve as leaders
  - 1. This is one of the primary functions of the deacons in our church  
They lead
  - 2. They serve as models and examples to follow. They attend the services and activities of the church, they model service, they demonstrate Godly living.
  - 3. They enlist and oversee others as they help in these duties and help to train up the future leaders of our church.

#### Conclusion:

- 1. This is important work. It demands special men. Pray for our deacons and our future deacons. We may have others in our church that God would raise up to this office. Some of our young men growing up today may be future deacons.
- 2. These men are invaluable to the growth and health of our church. Praise God for providing this rich blessing to His church.