

Why Do We Need Deacons?

Acts 6:1-7

Studies in Acts #9

© 2015 Daniel R. Hyde

It's interesting to look back on our lives and realize how formed we were by crises, pressures, and stresses in life. For some of us, it was the death of a parent or close friend at an early age. But out of that we learned to deal with grief. For others of us it was sports and losing a close game at a young age. But out of that we learned to work hard and to be gracious in defeat. What crisis, pressure, or stress did you experience that formed you?

As we turn again to Acts tonight we see the Lord again at work in such a time to form his church. We've been seeing in chapters 4 and following that crises, pressure, and stress were used by God to bind the church closer together, to cause them to pray more, and to give them more confidence in the Word. Our text tonight here in chapter 6 continues that theme. We saw in chapter 5 the external pressure of persecution and the internal pressure of moral corruption and now we see the internal pressure of complaining against each other. And through this pressure Jesus builds his church. In particular, out of such a crisis the Lord gifted his church with deacons. Why? Notice three reasons:

- 1. *To Serve the Needy***
- 2. *To Assist the Ministry***
- 3. *To Grow the Church***

To Serve the Needy

Why do we need deacons? First reason is *to serve the needy*. We read the occasion for this narrative was that **in the 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** (v. 1). Greek-speaking widows were complaining that the apostles, who were the church's servants at the time, were serving the Hebrew-speaking widows first and foremost. So they complained. That word **complaint** is the same word used of Israel's grumbling or murmuring against Moses in the wilderness (Ex. 16:7). But now the complaints were against one another. And making these complaints harder to bear was the fact that widows were promised special care from the Lord himself in the Old Testament through the ministry of the priests (Deut. 10:18; 14:29). And without Social Security, IRA's, or 401k's they felt uncared for!

Thankfully the apostles did not grumble back. They saw this as an opportunity for a growing church to grow spiritually. So when the twelve apostles **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."** The solution was for the congregation to **pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty"** (v. 3). One of the beautiful things to see here is that these seven chosen men all have Greek names. The Greek-speaking widows were complaining and so from among Greek-speaking men seven are chosen to serve both Greek-speaking

and Hebrew-speaking widows!

I want you to see two practical points here. First, the apostles took the complaints seriously. If you are struggling with something being done or not being done in the church I want to exhort you not to complain but encourage you to tell the leaders your concern. And leaders, elders and deacons, you need to take the complaints of your people seriously. Second, the whole church needs to be involved in the solution. You can't view the deacons as the only ministers of mercy. They are in charge of coordinating and overseeing mercy in our midst and outside, but they need your help. Tell them of needs; ask how you can help with needs; give when they say we have lack.

To Assist the Ministry

Why do we need deacons? The second reason is *to assist the ministry*. Again, the apostles' were overwhelmed with preaching the Word, praying for the congregation, *and* providing tangible mercy to those in need. Like ancient prophets, the main tasks of the minister of the Word is to preach and to pray, but the apostles were leaving that ministry for another ministry, that of serving tables (v. 2). But by adding ministers of mercy to assist the ministers of the Word the apostles could **devote themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word** (v. 4).

Note that they are not saying this ministry of serving tables was below the apostles, but that if they did this ministry of table the other ministry of the Word would

¹ Waters, *Acts*, 167.

both be hindered and not done well. Also note that we learn here a warning to one of the ways we may think of deacons. Deacons are not just a stepping stone position for younger men whom we think will later become elders. Deacons have an inherent dignity and office of ministers of mercy.

So how do the deacons assist the ministry of the Word?

First and foremost they practically free up the Lord's servants of the Word to spend time in the Word so they can speak it to you.

Second, in this they enable the minister to be a living example before you. Note that the church's devotion to the apostles' doctrine and the prayers we read about in 2:42 is reflected here in the minister. In practical terms, how can I expect you to devote your life to the Word and prayer if I don't? When deacons so their ministry well I can do mine well, which in turn helps you to do well in the Word and prayer.

Third, they show in deeds what the ministry of the Word expresses in words. The ministry of the Word is the mouth of Christ among us; the deacons are the hands of Christ among us. By setting and serving tables they demonstrate the love of Christ that is preached in the Word. And this is not just mere outward action. These are men **full of faith and of the Holy Spirit** (v. 5).

To Grow the Church

Why do we need deacons? The final reason we find in our text is *to grow the church*.

We read that because the seven deacons were serving the needy members of the church thus assisting the apostles to be ministers of the Word that therefore **the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith** (v. 7).

And let me apply this to us all. I need the deacons. And the deacons need you. They assist me. You need to assist them. When you see the deacons serving, let them be an example to you. Ask yourself, “How can I help this church tangibly? How can I help this church grow by the blessing of the Lord?” All your tangible acts of service and self-sacrifice—whether it is making a list of snacks or bringing snacks, showing up early to set-up or staying late to clean up, or being the face of the congregation as a greeter or going out of your way to welcome someone near where you are sitting—be assured that all these services are seen and used by God to grow this church. Do you want your church to grow? Then serve. That’s what Jesus did: “I did not come to be served but to serve.” That’s what Jesus calls you to. Let’s pray.