

The Office of Deacon (#1) – Acts 6:1-7

I. Introduction:

- A. This evening I would like to begin a lesson on the Office of Deacon.
1. It will take more than one message, so it might be better to call this a series.
 2. And I'll be up-front with you. There may be a need to have a few ordained deacons in our church.
 3. This lesson is a step toward a decision one way or another.
- B. Let me start just a little backhandedly.
1. Will you agree with me that the **Philippians** is a wonderful book, full of great instruction and blessing?
 2. Paul says, *"for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain."* There is a principle for any Christian to follow.
 3. *"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."* There is another.
 4. *"At the name of Jesus every knee should bow... and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*
 5. *"Brethren, I count not myself to apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reading forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."*
 6. *"Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body."*
 7. *"Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand."*
 - a. *Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.*
 - b. *And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*
 - c. *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*
 8. *"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."*
- C. What if I told you that **Philippians 6:19** is **NOT** a **promise** which **YOU** can take to yourself?
1. That verse reads, *"My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."*
 2. Can we be blessed by the **last verse** in this book if we don't meet the qualification of the **first verse**?
 3. **Philippians 6:23** says, *"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all, amen."*
 4. What is the first verse of **Philippians**?
 5. It reads, *"Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons..."*
 6. Has there ever been a hyper-baptist who declared that if an otherwise doctrinally-sound church didn't have both a bishop and at least one deacon it was not a scriptural church?
 7. I don't know the answer to that question, but from what I know about Baptists, I wouldn't be surprised.
- D. But, I hope you know that I am being facetious.
1. And yet here is the point, if the churches of Christ in the Bible had deacons, then why don't we?
 2. It's an honest question.
 3. Do we lack a deacon or two simply because we aren't large enough, or we don't have any Greek widows?
 4. As David said to his brother, *"Is there not a cause?"* That is something we are going to explore.
- E. The **first** three points of my lesson, or perhaps the three **major** points to this lesson are:
1. The **Condition** of the Church; the **Problem** in the Church, and the **Solution** to that Problem.
 2. The church of which I speak was Christ's assembly in Jerusalem.
 3. That ecclesia, somewhat like Adam as the head of the human race, is the ancestor of us – our church.
 4. There are lessons and even problems found in that first church which apply to us today.

II. Before we get to the deacons we need to recognize **THE CONDITION** of that church.

- A. When the dust settled after the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, followed by His ascension into Heaven ...
1. After the re-commissioning of the church and the members' return from Galilee to Jerusalem ...
 2. Peter stood up in the midst of the membership – which numbered 120 – **Acts 1:16**.
 3. In the realism of today's world, a Baptist congregation of 120, especially in our part of the world, would be fantastic – it would be considered to be large.
 4. And that *“these all continued with one accord in prayer & supplication”* should be considered **miraculous**.
 5. The actual number in attendance was larger than 120, because we know that it didn't include the women and there were probably many others as well.
- B. In **Acts 2** the power of the Holy Spirit fell upon that church and the Apostles, blessing their unity and prayer.
1. And **verse 41** tells us that following Peter's Pentecostal message, *“the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls, and they continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine, and fellowship and breaking of bread and in prayers.”*
 2. And even though we don't see this in other churches, those brethren shared virtually all their secular possessions.
 3. They were not a commune – sharing wives, husbands, children and dogs.
 4. But they volutarily *“sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.”*
 - a. We do not see this any other churches, so this is not a principle to be strictly applied to every church.
 - b. This was a church with special circumstances, and I am not going to fault them for following this plan.
 5. And Christ certainly didn't fault them, because *“the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”* So the 120 almost instantly grew to over 3,000 with more and more being added daily.
- C. After the miracle at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, **Acts 4:4** says that an additional 5,000 people were saved, many of whom most likely joined themselves to the Apostles and the church.
1. Throughout this time there were hints of persecution, which were fanned into flames from time to time.
 2. Peter and John were arrested and told that they were preaching hatred towards the orthodox Jews and they must shut up, but they replied, *“We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”*
 3. Then God sent an earthquake which shook the hearts of the Sanhedrin – **Acts 4:31**.
 4. At about that time the Apostles were released by their captors and made their report to the church.
 5. And once again we are told how the people were so united that they shared their wealth with each other.
 6. We are told particularly about Barnabas.
 - a. *“And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,*
 - b. *Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.”*
- D. At this point in the history of that church things began to change.
1. Whether or not Satan was aware of it earlier, he had come to see that the Lord had sent a new battalion into the spiritual war for the glory of the Lord – Christ has a church.
 2. So the Devil began a counter attack. But it was not an attack on the doctrines of that church.
 - a. He had tried to discredit the account of Jesus' resurrection, and that basically fizzled out.
 - b. At this point he didn't intensify his attack on the deity of Christ.
 - c. And he essentially ignored the doctrine of the atonement
 3. Satan doesn't even try to discredit the Apostles, which might have been somewhat easy to do.
- E. In **Acts 5** we begin with the account of Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, who longed to have the spotlight of the church move from Barnabas, or the Apostles, to themselves.
1. They said, *“We have sold a piece of property for 'so much,' and here is our profit,”* dropping a great deal of silver into the church offering box.
 2. The truth was the property was sold for much more than *“so much,”* and they were lying, keeping back part of the profit.

3. Lead by the Holy Spirit Peter flatly charged Ananias with succumbing to the temptation of Satan – **Acts 5:3**
 - a. It is not my opinion that the Ananias affair was Satanic in origin; Peter tells us so.
 - b. This was an attack of the Devil not just upon Ananias, but upon the first of the Lord's churches.
 4. Then after God judged Ananias and his wife with immediate death, *"Great fear came upon all the church, AND upon as many as heard these things"* – **verse 11**.
 5. The phenomenal growth of the church to this point came to a screeching halt.
 6. Despite ongoing displays of divine power, *"of the rest durst no man join himself to them."*
 7. The word *"join"* in **verse 13**, literally speaks about glue.
 8. The few who did join the church were absolutely sincere and glued themselves to Lord's assembly.
- F. Later in that chapter, the Apostles were arrested once again and were put into the common prison.
1. But it takes more than a common prison to restrain the uncommon power of God.
 - a. *"The angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said,*
 - b. *Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life,"* and they obeyed.
 2. The apostles were then re-arrested and brought before the Jewish council.
 - a. The corrupt High Priest said, *"Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.*
 - b. *Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men."*
 3. At that point, some of the Sanhedrin started calling for the execution the leaders of Christ's church.
 - a. But one of the most conservative of the Jewish leaders, and one of the most wise, **Gamaliel**, intervened, calling for calm and telling the council that God would take care of the matter.
 - b. Remember this Gamaliel was Paul's instructor in the Pharisaic Law.
 - c. I wonder if Saul of Tarsus wasn't one of those men screaming for the murder the Apostles.
 4. The council listened to Gamaliel and decided to let God's men live, as if **they** were in sovereign control of the situation.
- G. *"And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and BEATEN them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go."*
1. How were the Apostles beaten and to what extent?
 2. Were God's people beaten with rods? That was not usually the Jewish way.
 3. They were probably striped with the Jewish whip – driven down on each of them 39 times with all the force of the most burly Temple guards
 4. Was the skin stripped from their backs by the whip or were they horribly bruised by rods to go along with a few broken bones?
 5. The Lord Jesus had warned them in **Matthew 10**, *"Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues."*
 6. How painful was the long walk from the judgment hall back to where the brethren were assembling?
 7. And how and where exactly were those 10,000 members meeting together, not forsaking their assembly?
 8. Did they gather on the open grounds of the temple?
 9. *"They departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, & in every house, they ceased not to teach & preach Jesus Christ."*

III. What was the spiritual and emotional condition of the church; what was its physical condition?

- A. Remember it had been growing at warp speed through the blessing of God.
1. People were being saved almost daily, and there were several days with huge additions.
 2. And those thousands were worshiping in near perfect unity – at least as well as human beings can do that.
 3. Many of them, including the wealthy, were selling off their earthly possessions to help their less privileged brethren.
 4. Following Barnabas' example, they were laying their offerings *"down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need"* – **Acts 4:37**

- B. Wouldn't you think that a church with all these blessings would thrive?
1. Wouldn't you expect that this was a self-perpetuating situation with the sky as the limit?
 2. Some might say that the Lord could not help Himself but to continue to bless until that church had a 100,000 members.
- C. But those who would say such things, apparently don't know anything about the Lord's enemy.
1. And they don't know much about the human heart.
 2. The first verse in **Acts 6** says, *"And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews."*
 3. In what could have been a perfect church, humanly speaking, there was a cancer growing.
 4. *"There arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews."*
 5. And that murmuring, like the murmuring of the Jews in the wilderness, could have split that church down the middle.
- D. I intend in our next lesson to examine that problem.
1. But in the mean time, I ask you to pray for your church, and every church you know.
 2. There is not Christian assembly on this earth, striving to serve the Lord, which is not in the cross hairs of Satan's sights.
 3. The Devil hates Christ's church; every one of them needs God's constant miraculous protection.