

The Work of Deacons

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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. 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. 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. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." (Act 6:1-4).

In the early days of the church at Jerusalem, a specific need came to the attention of the apostles. Each day, widows were being cared for by the disciples. However, likely due to cultural differences, the Hellenist/Grecian widows among the disciples were being neglected. In response, the apostles sought to remedy the situation.

The apostles asked the disciples to select seven men from among themselves to provide for the needs of these widows. The men selected were to have a good reputation among the saints. They were to be men of faith, the Spirit, and wisdom. The seven men selected would serve the widows; thus, allowing the apostles to devote themselves to care for the spiritual needs of the church.

While the term "deacon" is never used to identify these seven, this is the first indication of disciples being chosen as special servants of the church. The apostles would attend to the spiritual needs of the disciples; whereas, these seven men would attend to the physical needs of the group. As the apostles continued to arrange local churches as part of their exclusive divine right, formal qualifications emerged to help churches appoint deacons (Matt. 16:19, 18:18-19).

Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 3:8-13).

The work of deacons is vital to the functioning of the local church. While all Christians are to be servants, deacons are to be qualified for this office. As our congregation considers the appointment of new deacons, we will note their role in this article.

About Deacons...

1. Deacons have been proven in faith and life. Before becoming a deacon, a man must have a good reputation within the congregation. Over time, they have proven themselves to be reliable, godly men. Their character reflects a maturing Christian. They have conviction about the Gospel of Christ.

Additionally, deacons have been proven to be dependable in life. As heads of families, deacons manage their households well. There are many moving pieces to a household. Certainly, they must guide their families spiritually. Also, they have proven responsible for the day-to-day operations of running a household. Being able to manage a household credentials deacons to participate in managing the needs of the congregation.

Having been proven in faith and life, deacons and their families are examples of godliness to the congregation. They are evidence of what can be produced when God is made the foundation of one's life and family.

2. Deacons are accountable to the eldership. God ordained the eldership to oversee the local church (1 Pet. 5:1-3). Therefore, deacons are accountable to the eldership. The eldership is responsible for the process of appointing deacons, assigning their work, and supervising their work. Together, elders and deacons must cultivate a solid working relationship.

As with all relationships, there must be mutual respect and regular communication between them. Their relationship will establish the culture of the congregation. If their relationship deteriorates, it will have a ripple effect throughout the membership. If elders and deacons cannot cooperate, certainly they will be unable to foster cooperation within the congregation.

Deacons are to help the work of the eldership. They are to keep the eldership apprised of information regarding issues that may develop within the membership. While deacons may be called to assist in meeting the spiritual needs of the congregation, they must not attempt to solve problems on their own. Elders cannot effectively do their work if information is withheld from them. This is another reason why the relationship between elders and deacons is of critical importance.

Due to their credentials, elders must be willing to trust the deacons. Likewise, deacons must be willing to support the elders. Each separate office must be honored. When this happens, elders and deacons will have the greatest possible influence in helping the church grow by reflecting Christ.

3. Deacons never say "no." Filling the office of a deacon is an honor. However, being a deacon is not an honorary title. This office is intended to be used. According to what Paul wrote, honor is gained by serving well (1 Tim. 3:13).

Service requires a commitment to the congregation. In dispensing the duties of the office, deacons will have to sacrifice. There are times when their work will become a burden. They will have to sacrifice their time. Deacons must approach their work with this reality. Family support is especially needed in this area. When called on to serve, deacons must never say “no.”

A Personal Note

In the past, I have benefited greatly from the service of honorable deacons. In Akron, I received encouraging support in my preaching by the deacons of the church. Their support was especially appreciated when I had to deal with sensitive subject matters in my teaching. Due to their faith and conviction, they recognized the need for sound preaching. Their help was indispensable to me and the congregation.

Since being at Fry Road, I have found our deacons and their wives to be very helpful and encouraging. They have shown themselves to be dedicated to serving the people of the congregation. They are exemplary.

As the congregation now considers new, prospective deacons, I am encouraged by the future. We have families who love the Lord, His people, and the lost. We have families who are dedicated to service. As we begin a new chapter at Fry Road, the future is bright.