

# The Ministry of New Testament Deacons

## Introduction

- My experience as a deacon...
- If you grew up in the church, you may be familiar with deacons as:
  - Executive board. They make decisions, including hiring and firing the pastor.
  - Building maintenance, grounds crew, and the janitors.
  - ***Didn't*** originate from the Bible.
  - Recommend Strauch book.
- ***Pray.***

## Acts 6:1-6

- Acts 2 – on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes, people gather to see this curiosity, Peter preaches, three thousand souls are saved / baptized.
- So the church grows from 120 to 3,000 in *one day* (bam!), and in Acts 6 the *problems associated* with that kind of growth begin to catch up with the church.
- v1 - there is a complaint. Uh oh – the honeymoon is over. Acts 2, all things in common – Acts 6, complaining. And not just any complaining, but complaining over a ***legitimate failure*** in the ministry of the church.
  - There is a daily distribution of provision for widows – this is good – but there is a big gap. The Hebrew widows are being cared for; the Greek widows are not.
  - Do you get the sensitivity? **First**, it deals with money. **Second**, ministry to the most vulnerable women in the church. **Third**, nerves are already raw. Not a challenge → *just randomly pick* people...
- v2 – the twelve, the men responsible for leading this church in Jerusalem, bring the church together and outline the problem:
  - “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.”
  - Have you ever fixed a problem, only to discover that what you did to fix the problem created a bigger problem than the problem you originally set out to fix?
    - The apostles recognize that they are in danger of doing just that!

- The apostles have the wisdom to see that *the problem isn't the problem*. The problem is a symptom...
- They understand that what the church needs more than anything else is prayer and the ministry of the word.
  - And the twelve understand that these two things must be their priority. *v4, "but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word"*.
  - At the same time, there is an acknowledgment that there are other very important ministries in the church that also require devotion.
  - "Tyranny of the Urgent" – Charles Hummel. Conflict between (1) important things that are not as urgent, and (2) urgent things that are not as important, and the tendency for the urgent things to win out.
  - This is true of any elder team at any church – it really seems like sermon prep can wait, like prayer can wait, at least until we tackle this urgent issue...
    - The effectiveness of any elder team is directly tied to having – or not having – a team of qualified deacons who are functioning properly.
    - So God has given us separate but complementary ministries in the local church.
      - The elders shepherd the church, leading and devoting themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.
      - The deacons apply themselves to servicing people in sensitive areas that need to be handled by Christian men whose maturity in the faith has been verified.
      - Having separate-but-complementary ministries keeps a church out of a situation where prayer/word compete for resources w mercy/benevolence.
    - So the diaconate is not a step on the career path to eldership. It could be but it certainly doesn't have to be. It is a separate ministry that super-charges the eldership by allowing them to be devoted to prayer, ministry of the word.
    - Does that mean that elders won't serve and deacons won't preach? No. But it is a matter of devotion.

- v3 – “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;”
  - What do we learn from this?
    - Responsibility is given to the brethren. They call them “brethren” and they actually treat them like brethren.
    - But it isn't a *blank* check – this process happens under the direction of the leadership of the church. There are guidelines:
      - “seek out” men who fit 4 criteria – (1) men, (2) good reputation, (3) full of the Holy Spirit, (4) full of wisdom (→ 1 Timothy 3).
      - a specific number is given – seven. Is this a magic number? No.
      - “whom we may appoint over this business”
    - In the next two chapters we learn a lot about the caliber of men that they are deacons – Acts 7,8: Stephen (first to follow Jesus into martyrdom), Philip.
- v5-7 – the conclusion:
  - The approach pleases the whole multitude, v5 (remember, we started with complaining...).
  - They choose seven men, and the apostles pray and lay hands on them (seriousness).
  - v7, “Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem”.
    - It worked! The bomb has been diffused and the ministry of the word is flourishing!

## **Conclusion**

### *The local church needs deacons.*

- Not executive boards or maintenance crews, but deacons like we see in the New Testament.

- This is an office established by God for the blessing of the local church. It is a separate but complementary ministry to the eldership, and it allows both groups to devote themselves to important needs of the church.
- It will increase the ministry of mercy in our church, and it will also cause prayer and the ministry of the word to flourish.
- One caution: a culture can be created where the brethren aren't required to serve.