

Acts 6:1-7; I Tim. 3:8-13; Servants of the Needy I. The Calling of the Deacon II. The Calling of the Congregation

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, what is a deacon and what are they called to do? We started looking at the officers of the church last week with the elders and their role- this week we look at their fellow laborers- the deacons. It was nice having all those men sitting in the front last week- for everyone to see- that these men had been commissioned by God for service within the flock of Christ! The office of deacon fulfills an important task within the church- just as the elder do- as we will see. However, deacon are not elders in training- the roll of a deacon is not the same as that of an elder. Some deacons could never serve as an elder- while some elders could never serve as a deacon. Their work is distinct- and requires a different sent of gifts. But both offices are indispensable within the church -both elders and deacons represent the love of Christ for His own people. So today we are going to see that the office of deacon proves Christ's continued care for His people. Therefore, deacons must be mindful and diligent in their high calling.

### **I. The Calling of the Deacon**

We start by looking at the etymology of this office- the deacon. The term deacon – or diaconei – in the Greek- means servant. One who would carry food to the table or wash the feet of those who entered the house. Being a servant is not the most glamorous job, but it is a task that clearly emulates the service of our Lord and Savior! This image of a servant is exactly what we find in our text from Acts 6. As the church grows dramatically, there arises a problem. Some of the widows within the church- those who did not speak the native tongue of the Hebrews- were being overlooked. These widows were in need- they were either displaced or neglected because they had joined the church- and they had no way to support themselves and their families were unable or unwilling to provide for them. Without government agency or family support, they were all alone. So we have some widows of the church who have a real, pressing physical need that is not being met. The apostles were doing what they could, but the sheer amount of work was overwhelming. Not for lack of money, but for lack of manpower. In order to free up the apostles' time- as v. 4 says- the church is encouraged to appoint deacons- or table servants- so that no one would be neglected. The apostles needed to continue their work of preaching

and prayer- so the deacons would carry out the work of ministering to the widows and providing food to the hungry and needy. In this we find a division of labor that is still evident today. The elders are to focus on the teaching, discipleship and education of the church members. Their primary function is the discipline and discipleship. While the deacons are to focus on comfort, encouragement and provision for the needs of the widows and poor. Their primary function is to collect and distribute according to the various needs. It is for this reason that we call the deacons ministers of mercy. They are the caring hands of Jesus made evident today. The work of the deacon is just as important as the work of the elder- but it is not the same work. Both the elders and deacons are engaged in spiritual labor to be sure- but the deacons installation frees up the elders to do their own work more consistently. Although it is true that the elders oversee everything, they cannot do everything. The deacons work together with the elders for the good of the church. Not competing or undermining each other's work- but complementing their fellow council members. Since the deacon's work is both physical and spiritual in nature, their office must be viewed in its proper light. Deacons are not bean counters- they are not just money men nor are they only concerned about the maintenance of the building. As a spiritual office within the blood bought bride of Christ- they men seek to show the compassion of Jesus in a tangible way. Although their task in Acts 6 was to serve tables- distributing food and money to the widows- they still needed to be filled with the Spirit and wisdom as v. 3 states. Our form for installation puts it this way- deacons are to humbly and cheerfully collect and distribute the gifts of God's people- and in the relief of the distressed they are to encourage with both kind deeds and works of comfort and encouragement from Scripture. To say this another way- when the deacons visit the widows or the poor- they bring God's word with them! They are to pray for and with those who are in need or in distress! Not only do deacons seek to counteract the effects of the fall- seeking to bring healing and restoration to the body- they also acknowledge the spiritual implications of living in a fallen world! So the deacons will desire to be a friend to the friendless, a companion to the despised, even a father, brother or son to those who are all alone. Poverty and pain take on many different forms- so the deacons must be wise, diligent and observant! In this way they seek to reflect the Priestly work of Jesus Christ- pouring out His blessings upon the poor, weary and downtrodden. As James 1:27 puts it, religion that is pure and undefiled

before God the Father is this, to visit the orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. So lets get practical- what does this look like? What should a deacon be committed to- or what should we expect from our deacon? Well, their office calls them to oversee and delegate. This starts by organizing which offering causes will be supported by our church. Which ones need and should be supported by the funds that God has entrusted to our congregation. In that way they seek to support Christian ministries- many of which do the very work of tending to the poor and neglected of society. But their work must go beyond this. More than just delegation, our deacons must be setting an example of mercy. In our local church- the work of benevolence must be done. Listen to Rom. 12:8- we all have various gifts that differ according to the grace given to us- let him who has the gift of contribution- let him give generously. If one has the calling towards acts of mercy, let him do this work cheerfully! So the local church is also served by the deacons of the local congregation- the widows, afflicted and poor are not neglected. Deacons can also be depended on for godly advice, direction and encouragement. These show the love of Jesus in both word and deed! So to summarize this first point, our deacons are called to be faithful stewards. As examples, stewards of their own gifts and abilities- but also as office bearers- stewards of the gifts Jesus has placed into their care and oversight. They will also have to give an account to Jesus on how they managed the talents placed in their hands as well. Have they been faithful in their visiting, distributing, encouraging and praying? Now this is hard work- because people tend to hid their problems. So a deacon must be wise and sensitive- and your wives can be a great asset here! In fact, part of the work of the deacon is to mobilize and organize the mercy of our congregation as a whole. In this way, the women of our church greatly assist our deacons in their calling! So deacon, you also must know this flock. Know the needs of the people- visit those who may have financial, physical or emotional strain! Maybe a new child in the home is straining funds- or the loss of a job or a death in the family. Keep your eye on the sheep of Christ- so that wounds get bound and injuries get addressed. And for those who serve well as a deacon, these gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus- I Tim. 3:13 promises.

## II. The Calling of the Congregation

But what about the congregation- what is our responsibility towards them? Well, here we can be brief. It is our responsibility to support them in their work. We are to equip them- supply them- so that they can do the work they are called to do. This leads to a few implications. We should be generous with our tithes and offerings. If we see the need in our communities and in our church, we who have been richly blessed should seek to give so that others might be blessed through our giving. As I Tim. 6:18 says, do good and be rich in good works- be generous and ready to share! So by your faithful giving, you help equip the deacons for their work. Also, be cheerful in your giving! We know that God loves a cheerful giver- but also cheerful in service! If the deacons call on you to help someone in need- cheerfully use your talent for the good of others. Thirdly, be humble enough to ask for help. If you are in need- if you are sorrowful- or if you are distressed and overwhelmed- do not be too proud to reach out! The deacons can only help if they know there is a need. So if you have some catastrophe- if you can't provide for your family- reach out and ask! Our deacons are happy to help- so give them an opportunity to be a blessing from Christ to you! And finally, if you have been on the receiving end of a visit or a gift of mercy- be grateful for what you have received! Rejoice in the blessings that Christ has given you from their hand! Thank Christ for the deacons that have faithfully served and benefitted you.

To conclude, the first work of every minister, elder and deacon is that of prayer. So congregation, pray for them. Pray that God would give them wisdom and that their service would be received as from the hand of Jesus Christ! And deacons, pray for wisdom in your work- pray for the needy of our community and our church! Seek to do good to all- and especially to the household of faith. As Heb. 6:10 states, For God is not so unjust as to overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do. Seek to be servant of Christ's people- because Christ Himself came to be a servant of us all. He came not to be served- but to serve. So let the mind of Christ be in you as well.