

- ***Read Acts 6:1-7/Prayer*** Even in the church's infancy, there were issues that arose among the members that had to be addressed by its current leadership. At this point in the church's growth, we believe that there was just one large group of disciples that were headed by the Apostles in the birth city of Jerusalem. Even among this one group of believers in this one city, there was diversity that ended up causing problems within this people. What we find in **Acts 6:1-7** is a racial issue between Jews by birth and blood and then Greeks who had become Jews. This was no small matter with this church, and the disciples wanted this issue sorted out.
- The church's leaders, the Apostles gathered the church together and instructed that they select from among themselves men who could be put in charge of making sure that this business of the daily serving of food was handled correctly. Now, I recognize that the word "deacon" cannot be found in this chapter of Acts, but I am fully convinced that in this present stage of the church's growth and development these men were serving in the same capacity as men who would serve in the position of deacons in our churches even some 2,000 years later.
- As we know, this local church is in the midst of selecting from among ourselves more men who can serve as deacons among this group. The shepherds have been speaking with many of us to see which men ought to be considered to serve in these positions. This morning, I would like to aid in this process by considering Deacons and why/how they are chosen to serve. We will consider the situation here in **Acts 6:1-7** to come to understand why deacons are needed, and we will also consider the text of **I Timothy 3:8-13** to come to see what type of man ought to serve in these positions within the Lord's local churches.

I. Deacons serve an important role in the design of local churches.

- A. The goal of the local church is to save the lost and strengthen the flock of that location.
 1. The Lord's churches are spiritual institutions that ought to be fully focused on serving the souls of those within and around it. **Ephesians 4:11-16** shows us that God has set up His churches in such a way that its members will be set up to "grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ."
 2. Those people mentioned in **v.11** were put in place to facilitate church growth. Each of these positions is a position in which spiritual growth is its main priority. However, we know from personal experience and Biblical example that there is much other work that needs to be done within a local church.
- B. Deacons help to facilitate these other things being done well and efficiently.
 1. The work of local elders over local flocks is to shepherd the sheep. (**I Pet. 5:1-3; Acts 20:28-31**) The shepherds are appointed by the church to lead them spiritually. We see them included in the list of **Eph. 4:11**.
 2. This list also includes teachers and evangelists who would aid in the spreading and strengthening of the church through preaching and teaching.
 3. So if shepherds are busy shepherding and teachers and evangelist busy preaching and teaching then who is there to be over the other work that needs to be done within a local church? Deacons are those men who are responsible for the other things that are not covered by those who are busy shepherding, teaching, and preaching.
- C. This is what we find happening in **Acts 6:1-7**.
 1. In **Acts 6:1-7**, we explicitly see the Apostles making the statement that they did not want to have to neglect their work of spreading the Gospel because they were having to attend to this matter of the daily serving of food. Thus, we see them appointing these men over this matter, which was no small matter.
 2. The Apostles, who I would equate to shepherds of that first church, were busy with the Gospel and they then instruct the church to make sure that men are appointed to take care of this business and I'm sure any other things that might come up.

II. Deacons are to be men of strong spiritual character and integrity. I know I have been guilty in the past of speaking of deacons in terms of just physical laborers, but I think it much more appropriate to recognize that deacons are not just men who are good with their hands. Instead, they are to be spiritually strong men who just happen to be good with their hands or have particular skills that allow them to help the church to operate in the way that the Lord intends. Certainly the characteristics that we find that are necessary for deacons are ones that we all ought to strive for, but the addition of a couple specific ones helps us to know they are fit to accomplish the job. Let me also take a moment to point out that deacons are not "Junior Elders." Being a deacon is not a stepping stone to being a shepherd, and a man can be a deacon his entire life without being an elder, and vice versa. Each position has its place and without both the Lord's church cannot be as efficient as He designed for it to be.

- A. They are to be men who can be depended upon.
1. The role they serve and work that deacons do is important, and therefore the need is for men who are reliable and can be trusted to actually be able to fulfill their duties whatever they might be. This is an important question that I always ask when considering not just the position of deacon but also the positions of shepherds, preachers, teachers and the like. "Can the man do the job?"
 2. The characteristics that are mentioned in **I Timothy 3:8-13** help us to answer the question about whether or not the man is able to perform his job as a deacon. **V.8** in particular lists characteristics that help to show that a person is dependable.
 3. It isn't difficult for us to see why it would be necessary for the man to be dependable. Again, the work of a deacon is very important. Whether it be work concerning the building, finances, benevolent work, logistics, or whatever it may be...the work they are given to do is work that is vital to the proper working of the group they serve. This means that a man must be able to balance the many responsibilities in his life and not allow anything to suffer through his willingness to serve his local church. This might mean that a man and his family has to give extra effort in order to maintain balance, but it is certainly worth it.
 4. The failure to not fulfill their duties or to not get them done in a timely manner or when they say that will get done can easily cause someone else to have to do them which would take that person away from their own duties. We can easily see where this leads, and why it is important for deacons to be reliable.
- B. They are to be competent men.
1. Not only must they be reliable, but they must also be able to do the job they have been given well and competently. It's good that we might be able to count on a man to fulfill a job, but if he can't do it well....then is that really a good thing?
 2. For example, if I was ever to serve as a deacon in some capacity, it probably wouldn't be a good idea for the shepherds to put me over the treasury. Probably not too wise to put a guy who took 3 tries to pass accounting in charge of balancing check books and the like.
 3. Therefore, not only should a man be reliable to get the job done, but he must have the necessary skill set to make sure that the duties given to him will be able to be done well.
- C. They are to be men who have proven themselves through the way they live their lives.
1. So how is it that we can come to know whether or not a man is able to serve well as a deacon? Obviously there is at least a small portion of the unknown if the man has never served before.
 2. However, notice what is said in **vv.10,12**. They are to be men who have been tested. They are to have their lives examined to see if they are able to manage their own lives well before they are given the freedom to manage the business of a local congregation. This seems to be the reason, much like the need for shepherds, that a deacon be married and have children. How does he manage his house? Does he fulfill his responsibilities to his wife and children? If so, and if his work like and other portions of his life are in good working order, then it makes sense that they man would be given the responsibility to serve the group in this official capacity as a deacon.
 3. Also take notice in **v.11** that the wives of deacons and shepherds must be women who would only aid and not hinder the work that their husbands would be endeavoring to do.

When the need arises within a local church for work to be done, men must consider themselves, their lives, their skills, and come to decide whether or not they are fit to do the job that is needed to be done. The work that deacons do is often thankless because so much of it is done behind the scenes, but it is good work that is necessary for the church to be able to operate as smooth and efficiently as possible. Let me tell you that I am so thankful for the deacons that we have. They take care of so many things that I don't even have to think about and it allows me to focus on my work and it allows the shepherds to focus on their work. From me, thank you for the work you do, deacons. But also recognize that your work is blessed by God. These who do the good work of a deacon will obtain, as Paul says, "a high standing and great confidence in the faith." The work is needed, it can be difficult, but it must all be to the glory of God. May He be with us over the coming weeks as we hope to appoint some more men to this work and may this church be blessed by the leadership that God has blessed us with here in this place as we seek to serve Him and strengthen His Kingdom in this place.