

# **“Wanted: Deacons Who Desire To Be Servants!”**

**“Discovering The Biblical Role Of Deacons”**



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# Introduction

I have been in full time Gospel ministry for almost 51 years. During these 51 years, I have had the privilege of pastoring some great churches, and in these churches I have been blessed to work with some great deacons who have served faithfully along side of me as we have attempted to reach the lost with the Gospel and to build up the body of believers. I must say that it would have been absolutely impossible for me to have seen the great growth in my churches without the Christ like servant spirit that I have seen so manifested by many of the deacons that I have worked with. I must also tell you that most of my memories about the deacons who have served with me down through the years are good ones. Yet, there were a few that never did come to understand their role, and thus, they failed miserably and ended up either causing major problems in the church body, or they ended up finally leaving the church.

Today in our churches across America there is a constant struggle to get qualified men to serve in the position of a deacon. One reason for this is that there are two extremes when it comes to the role of deacons, and both of these are harming the growth and development of the local church. First, there is the extreme concept which has been taught in many Baptist churches for years and years that the deacons should run and control the church. In other words, these controlling “boards” as they have been called believe that nothing should ever happen or be done in “their” church without their approval or consent. Many of these kind of deacon run churches have become this way because of the constant turnover of pastoral leadership, or because the church is a patriarch or matriarch church run by one or two families that are related to each other with some family member or members always serving on the deacon “board”. And usually, most of the decisions that are made within this deacon run church are not made with a vision for the lost world, but they are made with selfish self-preservation and self-perpetuation in mind. This is totally foreign to the Biblical teaching of the New Testament, and if the church is ever to break out of it’s status quo service in the Kingdom of God, this kind of deacon role must be changed. The Biblical role of a deacon is not one of authority or control, but it is one of a servant which we will see in this study.

The second extreme as far as deacon service is concerned in the American church which is causing harm to the church bodies across America is the concept that deacons have no role of authority, and that they are basically just a loose knit group of people that are just called upon to run here and there at the desire and whim of every church member. In other words, they just become gophers or errand boys for immature Christians who have decided to take advantage of and manipulate these dear men. When this happens, they are usually gone from home almost every evening of the week, and they often times become nothing more than sounding boards and dumping stations for the critics and whiners in the church. Although we find some of this role of listening to whiners in the New Testament church, it was not the main purpose of the deacon to be used and abused by constant complainers and whiners. So, the key to avoiding this extreme as well as the one mentioned earlier, is for every deacon and prospective deacon to find the balance of serving according to the New Testament pattern, and leave the rest up to God. For Jesus said in **Matthew 16:18**, “....I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” So, when the pastor and deacons have fulfilled their roles to the best of their abilities, God will give the increase as we will see in our study of this material.

Now, as we begin our study together, I want you to open your hearts and minds and try your best to approach this study with an objective mind rather than being biased by your years of previous deacon service. We are all affected by what we have learned and experienced in the past, but when we are learning some new truth, it is easy for us to miss what God is trying to show us because past knowledge and past experiences close our minds to what God is trying to show us. This is always true in studying any passage of the Bible, but we must do our best to see what new truth God is giving to us, even when we have studied a passage of scripture many times before. Just open your hearts and minds to what the Holy Spirit has for you, and you will go away from this study with some new principles to help you better serve in the role of a deacon.

# Lesson 1

## “Chosen To Be A Deacon”

Scripture: Acts 6:1-7

### Introduction

So, you have been chosen to be a deacon in your church! Just what does this mean to you? Does it mean that you have now arrived in your spiritual climb upward? Does it mean that you have now been placed in a role of power and authority? Does it mean that you have now had a target placed on your back for all the trouble makers in the church to shoot at? Does it mean that you will now be in charge of the church and make everyone else walk the line? I hope you don't answer yes to any of these questions, but rather, I pray that you have already come to understand that the role of a deacon is the role of a servant. Yet, I can tell you that you have been chosen to a honorable role in the church because according to the New Testament, there are only two offices in the church: one is the office of the pastor, and the other is the office of the deacon. And, both of these offices have great distinctives, but both of them demand servanthood. And truthfully, there is no higher calling that a man can be called to than that of a servant! Remember what Jesus said to James and John when they asked him about having the greatest position in the Kingdom. He stated in **Matthew 20:26-28**, “**But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister: And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.**” The words that Jesus used in this text about being a minister and servant come from the same Greek root word, diakonos, and it means to run errands, wait on tables, or do other menial tasks. This is the word from which we get the English word deacon. So, the idea is that a deacon is a servant and is not chosen to lord over God's people. Thus, a deacon who desires to be a servant is one that is just like Jesus.

In our study in this lesson we are going to talk about being chosen to be a deacon to serve the body of Christ. Our study comes from the **Book of Acts, chapter 6, verses 1-7**. In this text we find the early church facing a great problem. The problem was that the church was growing so rapidly that hurting people were being neglected in having their basic needs met. Therefore, a racial and ethnic group argument developed between some people in the church. And, because of the great demands upon the disciples for study and preaching, there had to be some additional men selected to take care of the widows that were being neglected. Although, this passage doesn't say that these were newly appointed deacons, it is obvious to me that the very nature of their job description indicates that this was the first selection of deacons. I want us to study carefully this text and learn some wonderful things about the significance of being chosen a deacon. My goal in this text is to get every deacon to understand more about his calling and the great privilege that it is to serve in the role of a deacon. And, hopefully, by studying this material together, each deacon will begin to take more seriously his role and responsibilities as a servant of Jesus Christ. Now, let's begin our study of these verses.

### I. NOTICE THE PROBLEMS THAT CALLED FOR DEACONS. v. 1

#### A. It was a growth problem. v. 1a

In the first part of this verse we are told that the early church was growing by multiplication. People were getting saved and the church was experiencing growth by the thousands. The very fact that the church was growing demanded that the apostles appoint some new men who were faithful and qualified to help them minister to the new saints in Jerusalem. May God grant us in this generation growing churches so that we have great need to

enlist others to take care of the numbers of people coming into the fellowship. The sad thing in many of our churches is that most of the time when deacons are elected, it is not because of growth problems, but simply because of ritual and tradition, or because some have rotated off. Yet, I do sincerely believe that God will still grow great churches in this generation if we will pay the price to allow His presence and anointing upon our churches, and if the members of the church will have a hard work and growth mentality. As deacons, I pray that you will never be a hindrance to the growth of your church. If you don't have a growth mentality, you don't have a New Testament Church mentality!

B. It was also a grumbling problem. v. 1a

Well, the church was growing and those who had lands and possessions sold everything they had in order to distribute to those in need. Yet, because of so many people coming to Christ and getting saved, the disciples were not able to meet all of the needs, especially for the widows of the Grecians.

May I say at this point that I have no doubt that the problem was not just a numbers problem, but I believe there was probably some racial prejudice which caused the Jews to take care of their own before they would the widows of the Greeks. Thus, the problem was made worse by racial prejudice. Believe me, I know all about racial and tribal prejudice because I work so much in Africa. I have found the tribal prejudice between the different tribes in Africa, but my discovery of racial prejudice is here in America where I am trying to raise funds for black people in predominantly white churches. What a terrible thing it is for any of God's people who have been saved by the same grace of God to have disdain for brothers and sisters of another race or color. According to **Revelation, chapter five**, one day there will be people from every tribe and nation around the throne in heaven. May God help every deacon and every Christian to help solve the racial problems rather than contribute to the racial problem!

## II. NOTICE THE PURPOSE OF DEACONS. v. 2

A. The first purpose was to alleviate the pastors' burdens. v. 2a

In this verse we discover that the apostles called the multitudes together and began to discuss how they would solve the problem about so many demands that were upon themselves. I think it is worth noting that the apostles had their priorities in order. They knew that the main thing was not the humanitarian needs, but the main thing was the proclamation of the Gospel. Therefore, they wanted to stop taking time away from the study of and the preaching of the Word of God to wait upon tables. Thus, the first deacons were elected to alleviate the pastors' burdens.

This would be a good time to mention to all of you that serve as deacons that you must be careful to alleviate the pastors' burdens, rather than to add to their burdens. Many well meaning deacons who are constantly bombarded by information from negative people within the congregation may have the tendency to pile this on their pastor rather than trying to handle most of these criticisms and complaints themselves. This doesn't mean that the deacon should make great decisions without the knowledge of the pastor, but it means that he should handle the trivial stuff that the pastor doesn't need to contend with. This kind of effort by the deacons is especially important if you are in a growing church. Why? Because as the church continues to grow, the pastor's load gets bigger and bigger leaving less and less time for study and sermon preparation.

B. The second purpose was to alleviate the people's burdens. v. 2b

In the last part of this verse we are told that the deacons were elected so that the apostles did not have to leave the Word to serve tables. Of course, as I have already told you, one of the best literal translations of the word deacon is table waiter. Therefore, by implication we are taught that the new deacons were to get busy meeting the needs of the suffering people in the congregation as good servants. It is important to mention that this is very impossible, if the deacons are giving themselves to church policy, trouble shooting, planning financial budgets, and or acting like trustees of the church. Truthfully, there will be less need for trouble shooting and problem solving if the deacons do their jobs well. It may just be that as the deacons carry out their role in alleviating the burdens of suffering people, the complaints and whining will decrease.

I do want to mention that there is a danger here for the deacons. If deacons are always giving themselves to meeting human needs, it is easy for them to forget that they were chosen because they met certain spiritual qualifications. Therefore, while you are busy with humanitarian ministry, don't forget to spend time with Jesus in continuing to develop your spiritual life. And, because deacons are commissioned to meet human needs, it is often possible to forget that every deacon should be a soul winner. The physical needs of our church members should never take precedence over evangelism and winning the lost. If this happens, the tail begins to wag the dog and the church will just become a social gospel church, which many have today! Every humanitarian act should be accompanied by the proclamation of the Gospel and the sharing of scripture.

One more thought here! Men, are there any hurting and suffering people in your church family right now that you have not made an attempt to alleviate? If so, maybe you should leave these sessions and lessons and start doing something about the needs. If you do, then my objectives for this course will have been met.

**III. NOTICE THE PREREQUISITES FOR BEING CHOSEN A DEACON. v. 3**

A. The first prerequisite is a life of purity. v. 3a

In the first part of this verse, we are told that the twelve disciples gave instructions to the brethren in the early church to select men with certain outstanding characteristics to be appointed as deacons. The first characteristic was to be men of honest reputation. The word honest here speaks of integrity or purity in reputation. The men chosen were to be Godly men who said what they meant and meant what they said. They were to be men of honest report who would be respected and trusted in the position of a deacon servant.

It goes without saying that the church in this generation is in dire need of men in leadership who are trustworthy, honest, pure in thoughts and actions, and men of complete integrity. We need men who can be looked up to, and men who will exemplify the Lord Jesus in their marriage, in their business dealings, in their finances, and in their conduct as leaders of the local church. If a man does not have the reputation of honesty and complete integrity, he should never even be considered as a deacon candidate. Any hint of impropriety or smudge of impurity or dishonesty should disqualify a person from being a prospective deacon. Now, I am not talking about perfection, but I am talking about choosing men who are beyond reproach in reputation and report.

B. The second prerequisite is a life filled with Holy Ghost power. v. 3b

The second part of this verse says that a man under consideration for a deaconship should be a man who is filled with the Holy Spirit's power. This power will be evident in the man's life, his attitude, his actions, and in his complete demeanor. And, I may go one step further and say that if a man is really filled with the Holy Spirit's power, he has to be a soul-winner. Why do I say this? Because it is impossible to walk in the fullness of the Holy Spirit without winning people to Christ. The very fact that the Holy Spirit indwells a believer demands that the filled servant have on his mind what Jesus has on His mind; and that is the souls of men.

It is also important to say that a Spirit filled servant will conduct his affairs and life under the control of the Holy Spirit's power. This power is resurrection power which causes the man to properly face all of the bad circumstances of his life with a positive and hopeful attitude even when circumstances seem otherwise. It doesn't mean that the Spirit filled man will never get down, but it means that with the Holy Spirit's power, he will be quick to bounce back just like Jesus being resurrected from the dead.

And before I move on, let me remind all of us that one day, all of us as believers will be brought before the Judgment Seat Of Christ to give an account of the works done in our lives. And, the criteria for this judgment will be whether we have worked in the power of the Holy Spirit or in the power of the flesh. Thus, it should be our goal to always live and serve in view of this coming judgment for every believer.

C. The third prerequisite is a life filled with Divine wisdom. v. 3c

It has already been stated in this verse that the first deacons were to be men filled with the Holy Spirit. They were to be men who lived in the Spirit, walked in the Spirit, talked in the Spirit, and men who conducted all of their lives in the Spirit. Thus, these Spirit filled men would be men with divine wisdom. And, because of the seriousness of the position of a deacon servant, and because of the many decisions that must be made in this role, a true man of God must have the wisdom of God to carry out the ministry of a deacon. This divine wisdom provides the supernatural discernment to make proper decisions in the role of a deacon. And in this day of the preeminence of proud pious people, sometimes to the extent of absurdity, we need down to earth common sense deacons led by the Spirit of God. These kind of men retain God's vision and serve within the confines and restrictions of Godly principles. No wonder these kind of men were chosen!

**IV. NOTICE THE PRIVILEGES BECAUSE OF DEACONS. v. 4**

Before moving on with the sub-points of this section, could I please ask you deacons a serious question! Are you a blessing to your pastor and staff, or are you a curse and discouragement to him and them? Do you make your pastor's burden heavier or lighter? Does your service as a deacon add more work to the pastor, or do you help alleviate his work? These are all good questions which we need to ponder if we are serving as deacons. Why, because the first deacons elected became a great blessing to the apostles who were studying and proclaiming the Word of God. Their service as deacons helped alleviate the burdens of the apostles rather than add to them. I pray that your service does the same. Let's take a look at two privileges that are given to the pastors and staff if deacons are doing their jobs properly.

A. The first privilege is that pastors can give themselves to prayer. v. 4a

This verse is rather simple. The apostles told the early church that they just could not keep spending so much time waiting on tables. Therefore, these new deacons needed to be elected to provide more time for the men of God to spend time with God in prayer. It goes without saying that if a pastor's time is taken up by so much busy work, he will never be able to give himself to prayer the way he should. Of course in this age of consumerism and me-ism, it is even more demanding for a pastor to try to meet every demand and need the church members may have. Thus, there must be some deacons who will come along side of him to take care of these responsibilities. And, the pastor must be mature and secure enough to allow the deacons to handle these things, even at the risk of not getting his ego stroked the way he would like. And, the larger the church grows, the less attention the pastor can give to the people's every need. And for sure, if the pastor is trying to handle all of these other things, he is neglecting his time of prayer.

And, I think I need to mention here that if the deacons are doing a good job to handle the secular matters of the church family, the pastor better not be playing golf three times a week continuing to neglect his time with Jesus. If he does, it won't be very long until his prayerlessness shows up in the pulpit.

B. The second privilege is that pastors can give themselves to proclamation. v. 4b

In the last part of this verse, the apostles told the early congregation that another reason for the election of deacons was so that these preachers could give themselves to the ministry of the Word of God. I am not sure every thing that these early apostles were referring to when they said this, but there are a few obvious things that stand out to me. First, if a preacher of God's Word is going to share the Word of God, he must be familiar with the truth taught in the Word. Therefore, I know that one of the main purposes of the deacons being elected was so that the apostles could give themselves to the study of the Word. This is crucial to any preacher. If he is going to proclaim and share the Word, he must have his life filled with the Word. And, there is no way that this can happen unless he devotes hours of study in the Book. He must develop a routine of daily in-depth reading and studying of the Book so that he can first digest the truth of God, and then, once he has grasped the truths God has given to him and strained them through his own life experience, then he will be able to share these truths with others in order to bless their lives. But, if the preacher's time is taken up with waiting on tables, his study will be shallow, and his spiritual life will be affected in a negative way. Thus, the deacons can play a great part of the spiritual life and development of the preachers if they will become the servants that God wants them to be.

Another thing I want to mention is that when deacons are elected and do their ministries of servanthood properly, the preachers can also spend their time in preaching and sharing the Word of God. I believe this not only refers to preaching for congregations or groups, but it also refers to witnessing and soul winning. If the pastor or preacher is tied up with so many other activities of ministering to the physical needs of his people, he will never have the time to become a great soul winner, and if he doesn't have the time to win souls, he will never have a passion to win the lost. I say this because the passion for soul winning is not taught, it is caught from the experience of doing it. And, I think it is evident from the lack of baptisms in our churches today that someone needs to take the lead and go soul winning once again. When pastors are free to do this, then deacons will catch the fire for soul winning as well. Then, every opportunity for meeting the physical needs of church members can be turned in to an opportunity to share Jesus with the lost.

Before moving on to the next point I want to mention something that I feel every deacon needs to know. You need to know what I am about to share with you because of the stress and strain it places upon the modern pastor. In the days before computers, fax machines, cell phones, e-mails, etc., the pastor's life was not as cluttered as it is today. Thus, there was more time for study, more time for meditation and reflection, and even more time for the pastor to make a lot of visits. Today, however, the pastor's life is so filled with so many activities that he is constantly under the pressure of one moment being in his study, studying the Word of God, and then the devil whispers in his ear, "If you were really a good pastor, you would be out soul winning." So, he feels a tremendous amount of guilt and finally leaves his study and starts visiting. Then, when he is out visiting and trying to share Jesus in the homes, Satan whispers, "If you were really a good pastor, you would be back in the study giving yourself to the study of God's Word." Therefore, the pastor can't win for losing, and his life is filled with so much stress. The reason for telling you deacons this is so that you will encourage the pastor to feel relaxed in whatever time he is using for the Lord, whether in the study or out in the field. You should always encourage him to find the balance in his ministry, rather than heaping more guilt upon him because some church member saw his car at the church when they thought he should be out visiting. You deacons can take a lot of pressure off of the pastor, if you will help educate the congregation about these matters. The pastor can never be in two places at one time, and he really needs help to feel relaxed in whatever capacity he is ministering. And, I assure you of one thing; on Sunday when he stands in the pulpit to preach the Word of God, it will have been very important that he has had the time to study God's Word. And, the entire church family will be the better off because he has!

## **V. NOTICE THE PATTERNS FOR DEACONS. v. 5**

We now move on in our text to discover the unique patterns that God has given to us for the kind of deacons that we should elect. In Bible days when people were given their names just after birth, they were given names that really meant something. Each name usually had a definition or meaning which the parents of that child desired for that particular child. And, many time in years to come, some of the names were changed or added to present a message about the character of their child. I see this a lot in Africa today. When a Muslim gets saved, he or she usually changes their name to a Christian name in order to bring praise to God. Thus, the name they choose portrays the new creature they now are in Christ, or it describes what they desire to become through Jesus.

In verse five we find the listing of the first seven deacons. Each one of their names has a definition which provides for us some traits that we should desire in our deacon servants today. Let's take a look at their names and see the kind of deacons we need in our churches today.

### **A. They chose Stephen, whose name meant crown.**

In those New Testament days in the first century, the name Stephen came from the Greek word, "stephanos", which referred to the woven laurel leaves which were placed on the head of one who won the Greek olympic races. It was a crown of victory, and it drew the respect of others who saw the person win the race. The name Stephen in this text reminds us that selected deacons should be winners who have a positive, never quit attitude, but instead, they will pay the price to run to the end in their quest for victory. What a difference this kind of deacon will make in any body of deacon servants. May God give us a number of these kind of deacons in our churches.

B. They chose Philip, whose name meant lover of horses.

Now, you may say, "Why would the early apostles choose a man whose name means lover of horses?" Well truthfully, I am not sure that his love for horses had anything to do with his ability to be a servant deacon, but I do know that when a person has a deep love for animals, that person usually has a love for people as well. And, maybe we could spiritualize just a little to say that one who takes care of animals is usually one that doesn't mind the menial tasks that accompany animal care. Therefore, my suggested practical application is that because of Philip's love for horses, he probably had compassion for those around him who had great needs. Thus, he already was qualified to show love and service to those who were hurting.

Deacon servanthood surely demands a genuine love and compassion for those in need, and it demands a commitment to helping those in need regardless of the cost. And, it goes without saying that a person who is faithful in ministering to those who are hurting must have a genuine commitment to menial tasks that usually receive very little acclaim. But, this is what servanthood is all about! Others may not give accolades to those who are serving, but never forget that Jesus keeps the records! You may not love horses, but you must love people if you are going to be a true servant of God.

C. They chose Prochorous, meaning a leader of choruses.

The name Prochorous is only listed in the number of the first deacons, and thus, we know almost nothing about him. However, because his name means "leader of choruses", we can gather that he loved music and was probably filled with joy. Because of the difficult tasks that deacons are called upon to perform, it is very important that they have the joy of the Lord in their lives. And, because often times in the modern church, deacons are called upon to face many challenging situations which are often very discouraging, it is a wonderful trait for deacons to have the joy of the Lord in their lives. And, we need to remember that just as negativism is contagious, so is the trait of joy.

I think this would be a good time for me to mention that in over 51 years of ministry, the worst deacons that I have ever served with are those who are always negative about everything we tried to do. These kind of deacons infect all of the other deacons, and they breed this kind of negativism within the church. The last thing in the world that we need as we try to minister to hurting people are negative critical people. So, let's do our best to appoint deacons who have a positive attitude toward the work of the Lord, and those who demonstrate true Christian joy.

D. They chose Nicanor, meaning to plait together.

The fourth deacon that was elected by the early church was Nicanor. His name meant "plaiting together". What a great trait for a deacon to have the testimony that he is one who weaves the deacon body into unity. One who brings people together is a reconciler and not a divider. God knows that in this generation when so many churches are fighting among themselves and splitting up, we must have deacons and other church leaders who can weave the church together in unity and love. May we learn from the choice of Nicanor and determine to appoint men who are unifiers, and not dividers.

E. They chose Timon, meaning honorable.

The next deacon that was chosen among the original group was Timon. This man's name means honorable. This reminds us that an honorable servant of God is one that has true

integrity and honesty; a man with an impeccable character. I don't mean that a deacon is sinless or is perfect. But, I mean that every chosen deacon should be a man of honorable reputation as we will mention later in our next lesson, and he needs to have a life that is beyond reproach in the church body and in the community where he lives.

And, I would like to say that after many years of serving as a pastor, the pool of prospective deacons who have lives of impeccability gets smaller and smaller. In a society where right has become wrong, and wrong has become right, it is very difficult to find men who live lives of absolute integrity. And, because the number of prospective qualified deacons gets smaller, there has been a tendency to lower the standard. Yet, to do this is to place less importance upon the quality of integrity and honesty than does Jesus our Lord, Whose church we are trying to lead as He builds His church. To use unqualified men in the role of deacons is to say that Jesus had it wrong to start with. And, we know this is not true. So, let's make sure that we don't lower the standards to accommodate the culture.

F. They chose Parmenas, meaning steadfast.

The next person that the early apostles chose to be one of the first deacons was Parmenas. His name meant steadfast! Wow! What a name for one to have! These are the kind of men that should be chosen as deacon servants. We need to choose men that are steadfast and have proven themselves to be such. And, this would be a good point to mention what we will later discuss in more detail, we should not choose novices for deacon candidates. Why? Because novices have not had the time to prove themselves as being steadfast, and they have not had the time to mature enough to handle all of the hard circumstances that they will be called upon to face in a deaconship.

I would just like to say that if I could choose any character trait in addition to integrity, I would like to be known as a steadfast servant of God; one that ends well as well as having started well. And, because there will be many difficulties that deacon servants will face while serving in this capacity, steadfastness is absolutely mandatory for success in this role. And, I think I should mention that steadfast servants don't vacillate with the opinions and influence of others. A steadfast man will be his own man, or maybe I should say, Jesus' man. In other words, he will steadfastly stand for what is right, even when others do not. May God give us many men like Parmenas!

G. They chose Nicolas, meaning a conqueror of the people.

Then seventh man that was chosen to be a part of the first deacon body was Nicolas. His name means one who conquers the people. This is the name from which we get the doctrine of the Nicholaitanes which Jesus said He hated in the Book of Revelation, Chapter two, verse 15. In this text in Revelation, the name Nicolas was referred to in a negative way. But here in our text in Acts, I believe there is a positive thought found in the name Nicolas. I believe that this refers to Nicolas' leadership skills. One cannot be a great leader unless he leads with compassionate authority. He must act with confidence, speak with authority, and he must inspire others with his enthusiasm. So, we should select deacons who would be characterized with these traits. He should not try to conquer and dictate to others, but he must be one who can inspire and lead others by his strong and inspirational example.

## VI. NOTICE THE PROCEDURE FOR SELECTING DEACONS. v. 6

Now that we have covered the problem that called for the appointment of deacons, the purpose for deacons being elected, the prerequisites for a man to be chosen as a deacon, the privileges that are given to the preachers because of the selection of deacons, and the patterns of the first deacons which give us the kind of men that should be chosen as deacons, I want us to take a good look at the procedure for selecting deacons. There are many ideas and methods that our modern churches are using to elect deacons, but sad to say, most of these are not in alignment with the New Testaments procedure. Therefore, many deacons are chosen because of friendship, influence, and in other non-scriptural ways. Thus, we discover the reason for so many men that are serving in the role of deacons that should not be there. And, because of this the local churches suffer so much unnecessarily. Let's take a look at the Biblical way for selecting deacons in our churches, and let's compare our methods of selection to see if they measure up.

### A. First of all, the first deacons were appointed by the apostles. v. 6a

Did you catch this? The early prospective deacons were brought before the apostles and obviously these early preachers interviewed them, verified their qualifications, and then the preachers prayed for God's will in the matter. Notice that there was no business meeting, no vote by the people, and no candidating for the positions. The congregation had recommended the candidates, the apostles had provided the qualifications, the apostles without a doubt, interrogated the candidates, and then after prayer, the apostles appointed the men to their new role as servants. This is the way that every church should select their deacons, and if this were true, we would not have the problems we have in our churches over the selection of deacons.

### B. Secondly, the first deacons were anointed through the apostles. v. 6b

The second thing we notice is that when the apostles prayed for the new deacons, these apostles laid their hands on the men, and obviously this was an indication that God's Holy Spirit anointed them for the deacon ministry, and it verified that the apostles were together in the selection of these deacons. There was no argument, no division, no popularity contest, and no discord over who should be appointed. The occasion was a very spiritual one revealing that God was truly in the procedure, and was a pattern that we should be following in our churches today.

Let me mention a caution here! It is very easy for us in our modern churches to get so personally involved in the selection of deacons because of wrong motives that we negate the importance of the Holy Spirit in our selection process. This process or procedure must start out with the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and it must end with the Holy Spirit's power, presence, and anointing on the entire process. Therefore, we should never take the deacon election process for granted or fail to see how spiritually important it is to the body of believers. We must always remember that sometimes it is too easy to select deacons, and if the wrong men are elected, it is not very easy to get rid of them without causing trouble in the church.

### C. Thirdly, the first deacons were then approved by the apostles. v. 6c

This might sound somewhat repetitious to say that the apostles approved every deacon that was selected, but because sometimes in our churches today deacons are elected against the wishes and advice of the pastors, it is very important to emphasize that no one should be elected as a deacon against the wishes of the pastor. If this happens, there is going to be trouble from the word go. So, we better make sure that this doesn't occur!

## VII. NOTICE THE PRODUCTS OF DEACONS BEING CHOSEN. v. 7

We now come to the last point in this lesson. Verse seven of our text tell us that as a result of the first deacons being elected, many great and wonderful things occurred. Let's take a look at this verse and see the benefits of the first deacon election.

### A. The products included the spreading of the Word. v. 7a

What a wonderful verse! It is so glorious to see that as a result of the first election of deacon servants, the proclamation of the Word of God increased dramatically. The extra time that the apostles were now able to spend in studying and proclaiming the Word of God was now bearing fruit in a marvelous way. What a thrill it is to know that these first deacons did a marvelous job, and the apostles were able to give themselves to proclaiming the Word. The purpose for the deacon election had been fulfilled, and people were coming to Jesus. Thus by implication, we know that these selected men were doing what they had been appointed to do.

Let me mention that it is always a joy for any pastor when his deacons take much of the heavy burden of ministering to those hurting widows and orphans so that the man of God can spend time with Jesus and then give more time to proclamation and witnessing. No church will every be the soul winning church that it should be until it has a body of faithful deacons who will do their job faithfully as servants.

### B. The products included the salvation through the Word. v. 7b

Think of this! As the deacons served in a faithful way, and the apostles were able to give more time to the preaching of the Word of God, thousands were coming to Jesus, and the church was growing dramatically. Folks, this is what all of our church ministries should be about. Our faithfulness should lead to the salvation of thousands of people. And, if our churches are not winning souls, something is badly wrong. The lifeline of the New Testament church is ministry filled with the love and power of Jesus in a constant quest for lost souls. To be satisfied with anything less than this is to fail to be a New Testament style church. The main point I want to make is that the election of the first deacons resulted in scores of people coming to Jesus. May God grant our modern churches the same kind of results when we put deacons in office.

### C. The products included submission to the Word. v. 7c

The last product of the early deacon election was that many of the Jewish priests were saved and turned to Jesus Christ. This is really amazing in view of the fact that these priests were the first ones to always give Paul trouble everywhere he went. Yet, because the early deacons took so much of the work load off of the early apostles, these preachers were able to give themselves to the preaching and explanation of the Word of God. Thus, many of these religious people came to Jesus. These kind of religious leaders always need more explanation, and because of the faithfulness of these deacons, more time was available, and these priests got saved. What a joy to know that the deacons shared in the rewards for these who got saved. Now, let me ask you a question! Are people getting saved because you have been elected as a deacon, or are people dying lost without Jesus because you are not doing your servant ministry properly? I pray that it is the early statement rather than the latter. Great deacons will help to produce a great harvest!

## **Conclusion**

We have now come to the conclusion of this great lesson on what it means to be chosen as a deacon servant. In this lesson we have studied the problem that called for the deacons, the purpose of deacons being appointed, some prerequisites for being chosen as a deacon, the privileges that pastors have because of the election of deacons, the patterns that were provided for us in the selection of the first deacons, the procedure for electing the deacons, and the positive products of having deacons elected. This lesson has laid the foundation for us to continue our study of servant deacons, and it has provided a spring board for us to dig deeper into the qualifications for those who are to serve in the role of a deacon. Hopefully, we have seen that the deacon servant role is a very serious one, and those who are selected as deacons to assist the preachers and pastors can either hinder the work of the church, or they can provide great help in growing the church. It is my prayer that from this study of the selection of the first deacons here in the Book of Acts, that we might be more careful in the kind of men that are chosen for this role, and that our churches and ministries might truly be enhanced because we follow the principles of the first deacon elections. We will now move on to discover some more great truth to help our churches to pick the right men to serve as deacons, and hopefully, to inspire present deacons to do a greater job where they now serve. Most of all, may Jesus be glorified in the selection of, and in the ministry of deacons.

## Lesson 2

# “The Biblical Qualifications Of A Servant Deacon”

Scripture: I Timothy 3:8-13

### Introduction

In our last lesson we studied with much effort and detail the election of the first elected deacons in the early church found in the Book of Acts. We learned from this election, that the apostles chose and appointed godly men who were faithful to assist them in the growing ministry of the early church. Because the right men were chosen, and because these early deacons were dedicated and committed, the early church really grew with new converts. And, the load of the early preachers was made lighter because of the faithful service of these early deacons who were waiting upon the tables of the widows who had been complaining about being neglected in the distribution of food. Thus, the deacons in that early church were a tremendous asset to the church, and the apostles were able to give themselves to the study and proclamation of the Word of God.

In this present lesson we are going to give attention to the Biblical qualifications of deacons as described in I Timothy 3:8-13. We will spend a lot of time discussing these qualifications that Paul sent to the young man Timothy who was the pastor of the church at Ephesus. This letter was sent to Timothy by Paul from a Roman prison, and it was intended to help Timothy get the right people to help him with the care and ministry of the church there in Ephesus. Because Timothy was a young man, he was having trouble getting some of the older people to trust and believe in him and his pastoral leadership. I believe that Timothy may have even been considering quitting because of the opposition and pressure that he was receiving. I believe this because of what Paul says to Timothy in chapter four. But regardless of the problems that Timothy was facing at Ephesus, he needed some godly and faithful deacons to assist him in his ministry, and he needed to be very careful who he selected. So, Paul, being the senior pastor and church planter, sent this letter to help make sure that Timothy got the right kind of deacons. It is my prayer that we might learn from this letter and this text and choose the right kind of deacons today. And, if you are already serving in the position of a deacon, this study should help you to hone your servant deacon skills, be a better example to the church body, live a better life of integrity, and carry out your role as a deacon in a faithful and dedicated manner. I do pray that you will open your heart to this study and ask Jesus to teach you, anoint you, and use you in a greater way as a deacon servant! Now, let's take a look at this text and see what God is trying to show us today.

### **I. THE FIRST BIBLICAL QUALIFICATION OF A DEACON IS THAT HE MUST BE A MAN OF GOOD CHARACTER. v. 8**

Ask the modern politicians in Washington if character is necessary to do a good job, and many of them will tell you, “Absolutely not”. Yet, this is the most absurd thing I have ever heard. What we believe and are on the inside results in what we do outwardly in our dealings with others. A man who is corrupt at heart, will always be corrupt in practice. So, having a good character is absolutely mandatory if a deacon is going to have a positive influence, be effective in his service, and leave a lasting testimony that will affect and change lives for years to come. It is certainly not by accident that the first thing that Paul mentions to young Timothy is the matter of character. Therefore, I want us to take a look at verse eight to discover the components of a life with character. Maybe each of us can measure our present lives to see if we have genuine character. Please remember that character is true manifestation of what is on the inside, and it is revealed most of the time when a person is by themselves with no one around. So, what kind of character do you have?

A. Notice first that character demands seriousness. v. 8a

In the first part of this verse, we are told that a deacon should be one that is grave. This means that a good deacon must take very seriously his role as a deacon, and he must understand the importance of what he is doing. He must realize and act upon the fact that he is in one of the most important positions ever given to a man, and he must realize that much is at stake due to the eternality of the mission God has given to the church. Therefore a deacon who doesn't see his role as extremely important to the Kingdom of God should not be serving in this capacity. Now, this does not mean that the deacon should never be happy or have some fun, but it does mean that the gravity of his role is always on his mind, and thus, he must give his whole hearted attention to what he is doing.

Many times in our modern churches men are selected to serve in the role of deacons, and some of these men never seem to quite get the fact that he is serving in a serious role. Therefore, he doesn't do his ministry adequately, and rather than making the pastor's job easier, he makes it worse, and often times makes church members mad in the process. If a deacon understands the seriousness of his role, he will give it his very best because he knows that lost souls are at stake, and that he will be judged in eternity for the kind of job he has done. May God help us to only consider serious minded men when it comes to selecting deacon servants.

B. Notice secondly that character demands single-mindedness. v. 8b

The second thing that we discover in the study of verse 8, is that a deacon should not be double tongued. This simply means that a deacon servant must be a man who is single-minded when he talks. He is not to say one thing in a deacons' meeting and then go outside the meeting and say something else. In other words, he is to be a man of integrity and confidentiality in his speech. He is not to be hypocritical in speaking to others, and he must stick by what he says, even when he might be influenced by his wife or others. You see, it is sometimes very easy to say one thing in a deacons' meeting, and then once you get outside of the meeting to be persuaded by influential people to say and do something else. This must not, and cannot be, if a deacon is to have credibility with the pastor, the other deacons, and the church body.

C. Notice thirdly that character demands soberness. v. 8c

The third thing that we notice in this verse is that a deacon can not be given to "much wine." The word for wine used here is "oinos", and when it is used in the New Testament it always has to be defined and used in context. The word may be used to refer to the new juice of the vine, or it may refer to fermented grape juice. In verse 3 of this same chapter, the pastors are told that they should not use wine period because it would hurt their testimony as leaders of God's flock. And, I am convinced that in this same context, deacons should not use fermented wine at all, unless it was for sickness as Paul instructed Timothy to do later in I Timothy 5:23. He told Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach's sake. In those days there was no pharmacy down the street that people could run to when they were sick. Therefore, they had to use what was available. Yet, in this generation there is no need for deacons or any one else to use wine because medicine is available for anyone, especially here in the U.S.A.

Now, I know that I don't have the time to spend on a long discussion about drinking, but I do want to tell you that God has never put his approval on anything that He has previously cursed. And, in the case of drinking fermented wine, God had already cursed it in the **Book of Proverbs 20:1, when He said, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is**

**raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.”** Therefore, God would not have told the deacons that they could drink in moderation fermented wine when he had already condemned the practice in the Old Testament.

Let me say that I am personally convinced that drinking alcohol in any form is a sin against God when there is no need to do so in this time in which we live. To do so is to ruin one's testimony, and to destroy the testimony of the church family. And as I stated earlier, we now have available medicines so that we don't have to resort to drinking wine. Therefore, the rules should be “no wine” instead of “much wine”. And, throughout the years of my pastoral ministry I have never allowed a deacon to be a drinker, and I think this is good advice for every church deacon body.

D. Notice fourthly, that character demands satisfaction. v. 8d

In the last part of verse eight we come to the admonition to deacons that they are not to be men who are guilty of ruthlessly pursuing money. The idea is that men who are chosen to be deacons are not to use their position as a servant to manipulate others to get financial gain or financial favors. In other words, they must learn to be content and satisfied with what God provides for them through their hard work.

Let me offer some warning here! In many of our modern day churches, instead of being servants waiting upon tables, the deacons control the money of the church. And, sometimes being in this position, they are tempted to develop ownership of God's money. Thus, because of their possessiveness of the money, they close their eyes to what needs to be done for the Kingdom of God because they pride themselves on hoarding money. These men are guilty of pursuing filthy lucre and should not be in the position of a deacon at all. And, may I say that through 44 years of ministry, I have seen quite a few men ruined by succumbing to this temptation. We must learn that whatever is given through the local church body belongs to no one but Jesus, and therefore it should be used to bring people to Christ.

## **II. THE SECOND BIBLICAL QUALIFICATION OF A DEACON IS THAT HE MUST BE A MAN OF GOOD CONSCIENCE. v. 9**

A. He must have a perceptive conscience. v. 9a

In the first part of verse nine we are told that the man who is chosen as a deacon must be a man who is faithful to the truth about the sacred secret concerning the Gospel that is only given to those who have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation. The Gospel message is always a mystery to those who have never been saved. But, those who have come to Christ have received the illumination of the Holy Spirit and by this illumination they have been given the truth of the Gospel. Therefore, a deacon should be one who has a spiritually perceptive conscience. Now why is this so necessary? Because serving as a deacon will demand divine wisdom to make proper choices. Thus, the deacon will only be able to make these wise choices if he has the spiritual understanding that comes through the Holy Spirit. And, he must be a man who will stand with convictions on the truth that God gives him. Do you have a perceptive conscience? I trust that you do!

B. He must have a pure conscience. v. 9d

The latter part of this verse tells us that a deacon must also have a pure conscience. This means that the man should have no guilty conscience, or even one that is blemished.

And, I think that this means that a deacon must not have a seared conscience with no feeling. How can a deacon minister to hurting people if he has such a hardened conscience? It would be totally impossible for a man to minister to hurting folks with sincerity if he has no empathy for those in need. Therefore, if a man is to serve as a deacon, he must have a conscience free from guilt, free from a lack of feeling, and one that has not been hardened to those to whom he will be serving. In other words, he must have a clear conscience and one that is enlightened to the needs around him. Purity in thought will produce purity in action!

### **III. THE THIRD BIBLICAL QUALIFICATION OF A DEACON IS THAT HE MUST BE A MAN OF GOOD CONDUCT. v. 10**

We truly live in a world of so much hypocrisy! Every where we look, we discover those who profess to be one thing, and then conduct themselves in an opposite manner. These hypocrites have done unbelievable damage to the Kingdom of God. I can assure you that what we are and do is of far more importance than what we say and profess. Therefore, even if a deacon has a congenial attitude, but doesn't conduct himself as a true believer, he is disqualified from being a servant deacon. In this section of our study, I want us to take a look at the kind of good conduct which every deacon should have. This good conduct will manifest itself in two areas. Let's take a look at these two areas and discover the kind of conduct that a qualified deacon should demonstrate.

#### **A. This good conduct will be a conduct that will withstand testing. v. 10a**

What kind of good conduct should a deacon servant demonstrate? Well, according to the first part of verse 10, a deacon should demonstrate such a righteous lifestyle that his conduct will withstand all the testing that comes his way and he will still come out with a good reputation and testimony. As a matter of fact, Paul is telling young Timothy that a man should not even be considered for a deaconship if he has not been tested. Thus, a man for consideration as a deacon should be a mature Christian who has shown this maturity in times of difficulty and stayed faithful to Jesus. And, this mature man who has proven himself faithful under fire will be a man that understands the importance of the office he holds, and he will do everything in his power to see that his office is never criticized or castigated with justifiable cause. He will recognize that his office as a deacon is much more important to the church body collectively than it is for him to succeed in the role as an individual.

#### **B. This good conduct will be a conduct that will warrant telling. v. 10b**

In the last part of this verse, we are told that a man who serves as a deacon should so behave himself in such a manner that his testimony is beyond reproach and worthy of telling to others. His conduct should be blameless, and not sinless. This means that in spite of the fact that he will never be perfect in the area of sinlessness, he can conduct himself in such a way so as to not bring reproach on himself, the other deacons, and even the church he represents. And may I say that I don't think it is too much to demand that a deacon serving in the name of Jesus Christ should conduct himself in a Christ like way so that others will see the love of Jesus in his life and be drawn to a relationship with Jesus because of the way he lives. Yes, good conduct and a good reputation is very important to the man who qualifies as a deacon. And, let me say that a deacon should not be chosen to make him faithful, but he should be chosen because he is a faithful man!

#### IV. THE FOURTH BIBLICAL QUALIFICATION OF A DEACON IS THAT HE MUST BE A MAN OF GOOD COMPANIONSHIP. v. 11

How is your married life? In other words, “How does your wife live, and is she faithfully serving Jesus as a committed believer? If not, you are not qualified to be a deacon! For how can you set an example for other couples and families in the church, if your home is not what it should be? So, in verse eleven we are told that the qualified deacon should be one with a good companion. And, I believe that this qualification is one of the most important of any we have or will discuss. Why? Because the success of any man serving God in any office is so much dependent upon the faithful support of his spouse. And, down through the years of my ministry, I have seen literally scores of unfaithful wives who have destroyed the success of their deacon or preacher husbands because of their lack of discipline and many other reasons. Now, let’s take a look at some necessary traits of a deacon’s wife.

##### A. His wife must be a lady of dignity. v. 11a

“**Even so must their wives be grave**”. Just like the deacon himself, so must the wife take serious her responsibility as a Christian lady. The word grave carries the idea of being serious and honorable. I believe this might refer to this lady being a woman of dignity; one who understands the role that she will bear as a deacon’s wife, and one who has proven herself to have taken seriously her Christian womanhood, especially before the younger women. If she displays a life of dignity, the office of her husband will be respected as such.

##### B. His wife must be a lady of discipline. v. 11b

The deacon’s wife must be a lady that is disciplined in her life, especially in the area of her speech. The word “slanderer” here comes from the Greek word, “diablos”, which of course is the word for devil or accuser. If this deacon’s wife is to fulfill her role in a Biblical sense, she must not be guilty of gossiping, bearing tales, making accusations, or breaking confidentiality. Instead, she needs to be a lady who honors the role of dignity she has or will have as a deacon’s wife, and she needs to be disciplined so that she will bring respect to this role.

The second word that is used demanding discipline is the word “sober”. This word means that the faithful deacon’s wife will have self-control in every area of her life. The word may actually be defined as temperate. Thus, she should be a lady who has all of the desires of the flesh under the control of the Holy Spirit. This means that she should not be flirtatious, loud, attention seeking, or even demanding of others. Instead she should be humble, teachable, submissive, and have a heart for ministering to others. In order for her to be this kind of woman, she will need to get her eyes off of self and on to others. And, if she does so, she will reap great spiritual rewards here in this life, and in the world to come.

##### C. His wife must be a lady of dedication. v. 11c

The last phrase in verse eleven says that the deacon’s wife “**must be faithful in all things**”. This means that she should be faithful to Jesus in her personal life, her family life, in her parental responsibilities, and in her life within the church family. She should set an example of self sacrifice, obedience to her husband, and she should work at helping to make her husband successful and faithful as a deacon. It goes without saying that a man will never be a good deacon, unless he has a faithful help meet to support his every effort. This means that she will be dedicated, faithful, and consistent in prayer, Bible reading, and in church worship and fellowship activities. She must set the example for other ladies.

## V. THE FIFTH BIBLICAL QUALIFICATION OF A DEACON IS THAT HE BE A MAN OF GOOD CONTROL. v. 12

After telling Timothy the kind of companion a chosen deacon should have, Paul returns to the man to admonish some more Biblical qualifications. Paul starts out verse 12 by telling Timothy that the deacons should be the **“husbands of one wife”**. And so, Paul starts out with a statement that has become the center of argument and debate for the last 60 years or more. Churches have debated, argued, and even come to blows about the meaning of this statement. But yet, when this text was initially translated, it seems that our Christian fathers had no trouble at all in saying what it meant, and meaning what they said. They just simply stated that the man could not be married but one time. In other words, a deacon could not be a divorcee. However, in our modern culture, we have tried to change in every way the meaning so that we can have divorced deacons, women deacons, and any deacons we wanted. But, I would remind you that in verse eight of our text, it states, **“likewise must the deacons be.....”**, and then it goes on to list the qualifications of those to be elected deacons. Of course, the “likewise” is referring back to the qualified pastors who were to be ordained. Thus, if we are to say that deacons can be divorcees, then, we must also agree that divorcees could be pastors as well. So, the can of worms gets bigger and bigger. So, in our attempt to satisfy our culture, we open a door of problems that never can be closed. So, why would we not want to let the scripture say what it says and put into practice the truth that is given.

I mean not to spend a lot of time on trying to exegete this verse of scripture, but one modern interpretation of this verse demands that I give attention to it. Some say that the phrase, **“husbands of one wife”** simply means one wife at a time. This interpretation is based upon the fact that during this first century church age many people had more than one wife. We call this polygamy! So, some believe that Paul is telling Timothy that a deacon should not be married to more than one wife at a time. Personally, I think this is absolutely foolish. Why would Paul give instructions that would even include the idea of pagan polygamists marriages, when it only stands to reason that a polygamist would not even be under consideration for a pastor or deacon. So, in order to come up with this weird translation, one has to really depart from correct hermeneutical interpretation. May I say that some people have become educated beyond common sense. And, to say that this means anything but the fact that a deacon cannot have been married but once, is to use isegesis and not exegesis. In other words, to see anything but a man who has never been divorced, one has to read into the passage rather than take it at its simple meaning. So, I believe the passage demands that just like a pastor, the deacon who is to rule over the church in a position of leadership is to have a home that exemplifies the kind of homes that all church members should have. And truthfully, that is what the verse goes on to say. Let's take a brief look at the verse spending more time on the ruling part.

A. In order for a deacon to be qualified to serve, he must manage his children well. v. 12a

In the first part of verse 12, we are told that deacons should rule their children well. This means that the deacon should be a strong leader for his children, and that he should have them in submission to his authority. It also implies that it is in the home where the deacon learns how to show love, loyalty, sympathy, and understanding. Also, in the home he learns how to handle authority so as not to abuse his children, and it is the place where he learns how to handle money and teach this trait to his children. So, I think we could say the home is the proving ground and training institute for a deacon. If he is a failure in ruling his children in the home, he will never be able to serve the church body successfully.

B. In order for a deacon to be qualified to serve, he must manage his castle well. v. 12b

The last part of verse 12 tells us that the qualified deacon should be one who has ruled

his household very well. This means that not only has he been a good leader for his children, but it means that he has exemplified strong leadership principles for his wife, his children, and his entire family. Thus, he has proven himself by living for Jesus in the home, and he is now ready to take on a larger work by ministering to the body of Christ. The word rule has the idea of being in charge, accepting responsibility for his family, and it implies that he has every thing under biblical control. His wife should be obedient to him, and his children should not be in a state of rebellion. If they are, he is not qualified to be a deacon.

I think this would be a good time for me to mention that I don't believe this rulership refers to a deacon having to have his adult children under control because once these older children have moved out of the home, he is no longer responsible for their behavior. Therefore, if a deacon candidate or active deacon has an adult child living outside of his house and is not living for Christ, this should not be held against the father.

## VI. THE SIXTH BIBLICAL QUALIFICATION FOR A DEACON IS THAT HE SHOULD BE A MAN OF GOOD COURAGE. v. 13

We now come to the last Biblical qualification that is listed in our text. This qualification is that a deacon servant should be a man of good courage. Of course based upon verse 13, this courage will be the result of a job well done and a confidence springing from a successful ministry as a deacon. What I am saying is that a deacon may have a certain amount of courage at the beginning of his ministry, but if he is found faithful in serving for a good period of time, he will automatically gain courage and confidence from having served well, especially in times of adversity. And most of all, I believe that God instills courage in our hearts when we have been faithful in the smaller roles as He is preparing us for greater tasks. Therefore, God gives us courage as we need it, but not if we haven't lived by the previous courage that He has provided. Remember that when David went out to fight Goliath he relied on the power of God for the battle because God had previously given him courage to face a lion and a bear. So, if we are to have a growing courage for our service for Jesus, we must take some steps of courageous faith and move out to serve Him, even when there are many risks involved. Now, let's take a look at two results of the demonstration of courage as faithful and dedicated deacons.

A. First, the demonstration of this courage will result in a position of elevation. v. 13a

Please notice what this verse says! It says, **“For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.”** The word degree here has the idea of being promoted or lifted to a higher level. So, what Paul is telling Timothy is that if a deacon has taken seriously his role as a servant and been faithful in doing so, by his efforts he will have purchased himself a higher position in the work of the Lord. I think this might refer to a promotion down here on the earth, and if not, I know for sure that it refers to the day when we all are rewarded for our service in heaven. What a privilege it truly is to serve as a deacon knowing that God will never forget our faithfulness. He will reward the faithful deacon here on the earth, and for sure when we get home to heaven.

B. Secondly, the demonstration of this courage will result in a process of proclamation. v. 13b

I am sure that you remember that one of the primary reasons why the first deacons were elected was so that the apostles could give themselves to the study and proclamation of the Word of God. In the last part of verse 13, we are told that when a deacon has been faithful in serving as a deacon, he will gain a greater boldness in the faith. I believe this implies that with this boldness, the Word of God will be proclaimed with more courage

and the Gospel will be preached to more people. So, we can conclude that when a deacon is faithful to serve in the role of a servant deacon, the natural result will be a greater proclamation of the Gospel, and thus more people will come to Christ. And, isn't this what all of our labors are for? I think it is, and I know that God always blesses the efforts of faithful people with more and more people coming to Christ, and with more and more people surrendering their lives to serve Him. So, every deacon should look at his role with the understanding that he is making an eternal difference for the cause of Christ and the enhancement of the Kingdom of God. Therefore, when the tasks of a deacon seem to be menial and mundane, just remember that Jesus is keeping the records and he knows just when to reward the one who is serving. What a thrill it is to know that the God of the universe would allow us to serve in His work and ministry as a deacon.

### **Conclusion**

We now come to the end of this great lesson on the Biblical qualifications of a servant deacon. Hopefully, you have discovered whether you really have the qualifications to serve in this role. If you do, praise God for your qualifications and thank Him for calling you to serve. Just remember that there is no greater position in life than to be a servant. If you do not, then you need to reject the offer to serve as a deacon and find your place of service in another area. There are many ways and places for you to serve without being a deacon. And, I assure you that you will be much happier serving in another role that you are qualified for, rather than trying to serve where you are not qualified. Because if you try to serve where you are not qualified to serve, then your life will be miserable, and so will the lives of others that you try to serve with. There is no more miserable place on earth than to try to serve where you haven't been called. And for sure, God does not call people to serve in positions where they are not qualified to serve. This would go completely against the principles taught in the Word of God. And, God never opposes or contradicts Himself in His Word!

In summary of these Biblical qualifications, let me just remind you of what we have studied. First, the qualified deacon must be a man of good character. Secondly, he must be a man of good conscience. Thirdly, he must be a man of good conduct. Fourthly, he must be a man of good companionship. Fifthly, he must be a man of good control. And last of all, we discovered that this qualified deacon will be a man of good courage. If we choose men with these qualifications, the evident result will be that they will be blessed, the people they serve will also be blessed, and the Kingdom of God will be blessed and increased. It is just like putting the ingredients together from a great recipe to make a great cake. If they are mixed properly, baked according to the plan at the right temperature, and iced with the right icing, the end result will be a delightful cake for everyone to enjoy. The difference is, that as a qualified deacon, you will always face an enemy that is trying to stop the work of God. Yet, Biblically qualified men serving faithfully in the will of God with the power of God will be victorious and fruitful. It is my prayer that everyone of you deacons will end up with the most fruitful life that you could possibly have. So, are you a deacon who wants to serve? I trust that you are!

## Lesson 3

# “Serving On God’s Team”

Scripture: I Corinthians 3:5-15

### Introduction

We now come to the third and final lesson in our deacon seminar material. This lesson is a very important one. I say this because after 51 years of serving as a pastor, evangelist, missionary, and teacher, I believe one of the greatest needs in the church today is for every pastor, every deacon, every teacher, and every church member to come to the understanding that the Kingdom of God is not for “Lone Rangers”, but instead is to be and should be a cooperative team effort. The team spirit is missing in many of our churches across the land. And, when there is no team spirit and effort, there is usually division, strife, and multiple visions in the church. Therefore, the church becomes nonproductive, souls go unsaved, and the church develops and displays a reputation in the community of fighting people rather than a reputation as a loving caring assembly of God’s people. So, in this last lesson, I want us to take a look at serving on God’s team and see how privileged we are that God would even consider us to join with Him and each other in carrying out his plan for winning the world to Him.

I want to stop for a moment and say that I have never gotten over the fact that God saved me, and then several years later called me to preach. The very fact that He chose me is far beyond my imagination. I can’t even comprehend why He did, but I know He did, and I also know that I will never lose the wonder of His choice. What I do want to do is to remain faithful to His call, and that I will continue to experience the thrill and passion of serving on God’s team. And may I say, that there is no greater place on the earth to serve or work than in the service of our King. May God always keep our minds alert to the memory of where we were when He called us, and may we never lose the passion to be co-laborers with Him and the rest of His team.

Today in this lesson I want to encourage all of you deacons to have your passion renewed for the team on which you serve as deacons. I want you to end this retreat on a spiritual high so that you can go back to your church with a new excitement and more committed than you have ever been. I want each of you men and each of you wives to be spiritually inspired by the Word of God through the Holy Spirit to give you a positive attitude toward your area of team service. What has happened during our hours together has been good, but what happens after we leave is what really counts. So now, let’s take a look at serving on God’s team and learn what a privilege it is to serve, but also, to realize that we shall be held accountable one day in the future for how we have served. It is an awesome thought that the God of heaven would call us, but it is even more awesome to know that we will have to give an account of our service.

### **I. THE FIRST THING I WANT YOU TO SEE IS THAT TO SERVE ON GOD’S TEAM, WE MUST ENTERTAIN AN IMPORTANT REALIZATION. vs. 5-6**

As we pick up the scripture here in the Book of First Corinthians, we discover that the church in Corinth was having many problems. The problem that precipitated this part of Paul’s letter was that the church was divided into factions about who was the best preacher or pastor. Some wanted to follow Paul, some wanted to follow Apollos, some wanted to follow Peter, and some were so proud that they arrogantly said that only Jesus Christ was going to be their teacher. So, the church was divided into four factions, and factions in a church always cause the church to be filled with tension, strife, bitterness, pride, and sometimes, even malicious deeds. And, when a church gets in this condition, that church loses its power, its testimony, and most of all, its vision for a lost world. So, Paul wrote them to try to get them unified and back to a team spirit. Let’s take a look at what he said to them about some things they needed to do in order to rekindle the team spirit.

A. Paul told them that they needed to realize the expectations for their service. v 5a

In the first part of verse five, Paul tells the Corinthian believers that there are no big people in the body of Christ. All are simply ministers or servants who are serving on the greater team. And, these team members have been selected by God and placed in their positions, therefore, there is no room for pride and arrogancy about the position they hold on the team. Thus, choosing one preacher above another preacher is foolish because this behavior goes far beyond what God expects. So, every team member must see themselves as a part of the greater team with the same significance as every other team member. The sooner a believer comes to understand this, the quicker he or she will come to fruitfulness in his or her place of service. As I stated earlier, God doesn't use "Lone Rangers", but he uses team members. And, the quicker one understand this, the sooner he or she will enjoy their role on the team. Ball hogs and loners may get more attention than those with a servant sharing spirit, but they rarely get the respect from other team members, and most of all, they never look like Jesus!

B. Paul told them that they needed to realize the equality of their service. v. 5b

Because of the fact that God supernaturally and sovereignly chooses people to serve where He puts them, everyone needs to see himself or herself as equally important on the team. It is kindly like the eye in the body looking down and saying to the big toe, "I don't want you on my body because you are below me." The fact is that the toe is a part of the whole body, and the body couldn't walk very well without the big toe. Do you understand what I am getting at? There are no big people and little people on our Lord's team. God just knows whom to chose, where to put us, and the position on the team that we will be best at! Therefore, the key is finding God's perfect will and living and serving within it! And truthfully, serving in God's perfect will is the safest and most enjoyable place in the entire world to serve. So, friend, find your spot on the team where God has placed you, and give your best to that position. If you do, God will bless you with fruitfulness, the team will be blessed, and you will be happy in your service. Remember, we are talking about Deacons who want to be servants! In other words, serving team members!

C. Paul told them that they needed to realize the effects of their sowing. v. 6

Verse six of this text is a profound verse. In it we are told by Paul what is required in every harvest. He says, "**I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.**" In other words Paul was saying that each person on the team has a part to play in the harvest. Some plant, others sow, but it is always God that gives the increase. So, no one can ever take God's glory! Once again we need to be reminded that our service in the Kingdom of God is a team effort. If there is no planting, there is no need to water. Therefore, the planter and the waterer is just as important to the project. And, maybe I should also add the cultivator and the fertilizer are equal to the harvest as well.

Are you getting the picture? There is no room for arrogance or pride as we will see in the next point, but every person is very important to the harvest. Have you realized this yet? I hope so, for if you are to serve on God's team gladly and graciously, you must realize this truth.

**II. SECONDLY, HE SAID THAT TO SERVE ON GOD'S TEAM, THEY NEEDED TO EXPERIENCE AN INSPIRATIONAL RECOGNITION. vs. 7-8**

Be reminded that the church in Corinth was in a state of friction and upheaval! The people were

acting worse than unchristians, and they were bringing reproach on the Kingdom of God. Why? Because they did not have a cooperative team spirit which is needed for fruitfulness in God's Kingdom. And, they were acting like immature children by choosing sides in this matter. So, Paul wrote to them to tell them further that there were some things that needed to be recognized, and when they did, they would receive a burst of inspiration. Let's continue to look at some very important things the Corinthians needed to recognize.

A. They needed to recognize that there was no room for pride. v. 7a

In the first part of verse seven, Paul the apostle just shoots down the idea that any of the preachers who were being followed in Corinth were really important. Why? Because it is not the preacher who brings the harvest, but it is God Himself. Preachers are only tools in the hands of a mighty God! We as instruments in God's service, serving on God's team, have no room to brag or be filled with pride. Why? Because we could do absolutely nothing without God's Holy Spirit Who lives within us.

B. They also needed to recognize that there was much room for praise. v. 7b

If the sowers and the planters are not responsible for the end result of the harvest, then all of our praise should go to God the Father Who gives the increase. It is God and God alone, that produces the harvest. Therefore, our roles should be to be servants serving on God's team helping to plant and water the crops, and then wait with expectancy until God gives the increase. When he does, then we should give Him all the glory. And truthfully, God really doesn't need any of us, but, He has chosen to let us in on his plan for man's redemption. What a joy it is to know that God has allowed us to team up with Him in bringing men and women to Him. Yes, we should give Him all the praise and glory!

C. They also needed to recognize that there was much room for partnerships. v. 8a

In the first part of this verse, once again we are told that there are no big people and little people on God's team. As a matter of fact, if we are really serving the way we should be, then we are all unified with one motive and with one purpose. What a thrill it would be to see our churches unified like this! What a precious time we would have with the Holy Spirit of God showing up in our worship services if we would just get out of the way, and let Him bring the increase. There is too much demonstration of the flesh in performance in most of our churches. If whatever is done in our worship services and in our ministries draws attention to individuals, God is nowhere near it. May we never forget this, and may we truly recognize that we are all equal before God, and may we be quick to praise Him for the increase.

I do want to offer a warning here! Many so called "spiritual" people in our churches today believe that showing appreciation or gratitude to those who serve is the same thing as giving them glory, but it is not. And, I want to say this with emphasis! Why? Because in most of our churches, there is so little appreciation and thanksgiving for those who serve so faithfully. We must show men gratitude and offer to God our praise and worship. And, we had better learn to discern the difference.

D. They also need to recognize that there was much room for perception. v. 8b

In the last part of verse eight, we are told that , **"every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor."** This is a very solemn thought! To know that every servant of God who serves on God's team is going to be held personally accountable one day in the future for the way we have played the game is a truly sobering

thought. Yet we do know that it is a fact, and more will be said about this later in our study. But, can you stop and get a hold of this today? The same awesome God that sovereignly chose us for His team, will one day hold us accountable for how we as servants on His team have played the game. We must perceive this truth if we are going to be good team members. I hope you have come to realize this in a great way.

### **III. THIRDLY, HE SAID THAT TO SERVE ON GOD'S TEAM, THEY NEEDED TO EMBRACE AN INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY. vs. 9-11**

We are all team members, but we also have our individual responsibilities. This is very important to remember! We may be serving on God's team, but individually we shall be held accountable. This is very hard for many people to accept in this day of blaming everybody else, but even if we do serve with others, we shall truly be judged for our faithfulness or lack thereof.

#### **A. Notice that this is a special responsibility. v. 9**

Verse nine is a great verse! It reminds each of us who serve on God's team that we are co-laborers in the Kingdom work and we belong to God. Therefore, because we are purchased possessions by our heavenly Father, we have an obligation to allow God to cultivate us as a farmer does his fields. And, we also have an obligation to allow God to construct and build us as He so chooses. Both of these metaphors remind me of a little chorus we used to sing, "He's still working on me." And folks, He will continue to cultivate us as fields and build us as His buildings if we will allow Him to do so. And, maybe I should say that He will often cultivate us and build us, even when we don't allow Him to do so willingly. He may do this through hardship and trials, but in the end, the fruit and completed building will bring Him glory.

#### **B. Notice that this is a serious responsibility. v. 10**

This is an even greater verse than verse nine. Why? Because in this verse Paul describes for us how He was given the grace to be the wise "masterbuilder." This verse in the Greek New Testament is taken from the word from which we get the word architect, and it refers to Paul laying the foundation for the church in Corinth. In other words, Paul says that he as the architect planned the building of the church, laid the proper foundation, and now the other believers in Corinth were to build upon the foundation which he had laid. But obviously, the people were trying to lay another foundation than the one Paul had laid because they were trying to discredit Paul and elevate Peter and Apollos. Paul was not concerned about this for his benefit, but he wanted them to know that he had put in place the right foundation which verse eleven tells us was Jesus Christ. So, he was telling the believers in Corinth that it was indeed a serious matter to mess with the foundation, and they better be careful how they built upon the foundation that he had already laid.

I want to say right here that we have already discussed in a previous lesson how serious we should be about the work of a deacon servant in the local church. And now again, we are reminded that serving on God's team is a serious matter and must be taken very seriously. In fact, if we will live and work in obedience to Jesus Christ, God will build His church through us as He promised He would. Are you a serious servant on God's team? If not, today would be a good time for you to make a brand new commitment to taking your role on the team seriously.

#### **C. Notice that it is a singular responsibility. v. 11**

Now we come to the real crux of the entire matter that Paul was discussing with the

Corinthian Christians. The summation of every thing Paul was trying to accomplish was that he wanted the believers in Corinth to only have one foundation in their church; that was the Lord Jesus Christ. Because they were listening to so many voices, they were prone to be misled and end up out on a tangent. This is still happening in many of our churches today. People are so gullible and vulnerable that they allow the wrong people to serve on the team of the church, but they might not be necessarily serving on God's team. Therefore, the people in the church get the wrong doctrine from people with the wrong motives, and the church moves away from the foundation of Jesus Christ. As deacons and church leaders, we must do everything in our power to make sure that those who serve with us on our team are truly members of God's team, and we must make sure that they play with the team in order to be productive and fruitful in the Kingdom work. Let's guard against losing our focus, but instead, let's keep one goal in mind. That goal is to keep building as a team on the foundation of Jesus Christ so that the entire lost world may come to know Him.

#### **IV. FOURTHLY, TO SERVE ON GOD'S TEAM, THEY NEEDED TO REMEMBER THAT THEY WILL INDEED ENCOUNTER AN INVESTIGATIVE REVIEW. vs. 12-13**

Beloved friends, are you acutely and keenly aware of the fact that one day every believer who has served on Jesus' team will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ to give a personal account of the things he or she has done in the body here on earth. The purpose of this judgment is not for Jesus to decide who will or will not go to heaven. That is settled down here on earth by whether one gets saved or rejects the message of salvation. Yet, as believers we are all going to give an account of our works according to whether we have worked with fleshly motives without the power of the Holy Spirit, or whether we have worked by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. If our works are tried by the glaring fiery eyes of our Lord Jesus Christ as described in Revelation, Chapter one, and our works don't burn up, then we shall receive rewards for our faithfulness. However, if our works are burned up as hay, wood, and stubble, then we will suffer loss and our team efforts will have been in vain. Let's take a look at this coming investigative review and see what is ahead.

##### **A. First, it is going to be a personal review. v. 12**

In verse 12, we are told that every man's works will either be gold, silver, precious stones, or they will be wood, hay, or stubble. The nature of the substance of our works will determine whether they will be burned at the Judgment Seat of Christ or not. Thus, it should behoove each of us to make a personal review of ourselves now, so that we can look forward with expectancy and not fear the day when Jesus will judge us. Serving on God's team is serious business, and because He has purchased us and we belong to Him, we need to understand that He truly has the right to inspect us at His coming. Please understand again, we will not be held accountable for other people's works, but we will be accountable for our stewardship of time, energy, and money. Yes, it will be a personal review probably in the presence of other believers.

##### **B. Secondly, it is going to be a purifying review. v. 13**

This verse is an expanded discussion of the coming Judgment Seat of Christ. What an awesome thought to know that we are going to stand before an awesome God and have our life of service inspected to see whether we have served with pure hearts and right motives under the power of the Holy Spirit. I am sure that all of us are going to be somewhat embarrassed when we stand there before Jesus with his blazing eyes burning away the dross from our service and purifying us for our life and service in heaven. There will be no adequate excuses, no accepted explanations, and no room for regrets when we face

Him face to face. Yes folks, that is going to be a difficult hour and I must say that I have failed Him so many times that I somewhat dread the event, but I do pray that I have done enough from the right motives and with the right spiritual desires so that I might be able to hear Him say, **“Well done, thou good and faithful servant”**.

C. Thirdly, it will be a promising review. vs. 14-15

We now come to the last two verses in our study. These verses are filled with hope and two great promises from God. First, God has promised all of those who serve on His team that if they are faithful and their works withstand the fiery judgment, they will receive rewards for their faithfulness. What a great promise that is to all of those in Paul's day, and also to all of us as believers today! May we determine that our goal will be to receive these rewards. Let me remind you that these rewards are reserved for those who do good works. We must never forget that our salvation is a free gift by God's grace, but our rewards will be given according to our works.

The second promise that I see in these two verses is that even if a man's works are burned up because of their poor substance, that person will yet be saved and allowed to enter into heaven by the grace of God. All people who come to Jesus and repent of their sins and put their faith and trust in the finished product of Calvary will without doubt be saved, but my fear is that many will go into heaven empty handed saved only by fire. What a horrible thought to think that after years of service down here, one can still go into heaven empty handed because his or her service was done with the wrong substance. The very thought of this should wake us up and help us to take seriously our role as a team player on God's team. If we really view our role as a serious one, our team effort will be more determined and resolute, and our service will always be in view of the coming Judgment Seat of Christ. May God help us to serve on His team with an eye on the future!

### **Conclusion**

This lesson has indeed been a great one! What subject matter to contemplate that God so loved us that He not only sent Jesus to die for our sins on the cross and rise from the grave to give us eternal life, but he also sovereignly chose us to serve on His team. Every time I think of this, I think back to my childhood days when we would choose up sides and play some kind of ball. Sometimes I would get to choose because we flipped coins or decided some other way, but most of the times, I had to wait on someone else to choose me after the others were already chosen. Why ? Because I had asthma and could not run very fast! But then occasionally, the most loved and respected leader would some how choose me, and I would be so happy to serve on his team. I can still feel the thrill as I ran onto the field knowing that I had just been chosen by the best. That surely made playing more exciting because I knew that I was on the winning team. Yet today, I am more excited because I have been chosen to serve on the team of the King of kings, and the Lord of lords. My future is settled, my hope is sure, and I know without a doubt that I am on the winning side. Therefore, the very thought that Jesus has saved me, called me, trained me, and put me on the greatest team in all of the earth is such a thrill for me. And, I hope you feel the same way as you serve either as a pastor, a deacon, or in any other place of service on the team. Just remember, there are no little or big people on this team, but all of us have the opportunity of doing a big job for a great big God! So, let's hit the field because time is short and the King is coming! What a thrill to serve on God's team!

# Conclusion

We have now come to the conclusion of our three part seminar and study on the subject of, **“Wanted: Deacons Who Desire To Be Servants!”** We have traced the selection and qualifications of the first deacons that were chosen in Acts, Chapter Six. We have also studied the Biblical qualifications for deacons in First Timothy. In our third lesson, we covered the wonderful thought that God would choose us and allow us to serve on His team. What a thrill to know that God doesn't want perfect people to serve Him because there are none. Yet, He does save imperfect sinners and then relishes the thought of calling them to serve as servants in and to the body of Christ. He loves to take common men and do uncommon and extraordinary things. When he does it this way, then all men are equal in the truest sense and just a part of His body. Thus, no man can take His glory for work done, but because servants are just planters, waterers, and sometimes builders, God gives the increase and furnishes the harvest and completes the building. Therefore, He alone deserves the credit and the glory.

As just a reminder, let me tell you again that there are only two official offices in the New Testament. The one is the pastor and the other is a deacon. Deacons are not chosen to run the church, but they are chosen to serve by waiting on tables on behalf of those who have great needs in the body of Christ. The faithful service of these deacons free up the preachers and pastors to give themselves to the study and preaching of the Word of God. Deacons should never serve in a role as screeners for every activity and event that takes place in the local church. If the church has a finance committee, then that committee should have a deacon representative on the committee, but the deacon body should not screen everything the finance committee does and all of the other committees do before their recommendations are brought to the church. This would be making the deacons lords over God's heritage, and even pastors are not to be placed in this role. So, deacons are to be servants and no man can ever be called to a higher position. Remember again what Jesus said in **Matthew 20: 26-28**, **“But it shall not be so among you; but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”** You see folks, the greatest men in all of the world are those who give their lives in service to Jesus and to others. And, we are never more like Jesus than when we humble ourselves to become table waiters and serve others in Jesus' name. It is truly my prayer that these materials may be used by God to help every pastor, every deacon, and every church member to be more like Jesus as servants. If this happens, then my work will not have been in vain, and there will be no more signs saying, **“Wanted: Deacons Who Desire To Be Servants!”**.

