



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

# **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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## **The Office of Deacon, Part 8**

Colossians 1:24-25, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church,<sup>25</sup> of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known”

The ministry of the Diaconate is a facet of the elder’s call to “shepherd the flock of God” (1 Peter 5:2). This is an important distinction for it places the work of the deacon NOT in competition with the elder, BUT in a complimentary role with the elder. Both offices serve the same end/telos when it comes to the church. As such in considering pastoral care, we begin generically with the child of God or the church in general, and we ask these questions:

- What is God’s will for that body or individual?

- What is it that God is doing in and through them?

I hope you see that the answer we give to these questions represents the calling that God has placed on the lives of both the elders and the deacons! Now however we answer these questions, it is the next question that is quite germane for us as we consider the office of Deacon. How are the deacons, working together with the elders, going to

- Bring to pass God's will for the body?
- "Equip the saints for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12)?

The answer we provide will be a description of the work of the deacons! It is so important that we see this for when addressing the ministry of the Diaconate or the Eldership, it is easy to isolate the two offices from one another and so arrive at a false dichotomy as to the purpose and function of each office.

With that in mind, let's continue in our examination of the ministry of the diaconate; that is, the who?, what?, when?, where?, why?, and how? of their calling and again, because the offices of deacon and elder serve one and the same end, we are able to take the statements Paul makes as to his calling as a minister here and apply them to the offices.

## The "Minister" of God's Kingdom

Colossians 1:25, "Of *this church* I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God..."

The word for "stewardship" [οἰκονομία] is a compound word made up of *oikos* ("house") and *nemō* ("manage"). It means to manage a household as a steward of someone else's possessions. In Christ's day, the steward had oversight of the other servants and handled the business and financial affairs of the household. That freed the owner to travel and pursue other interests. Being a steward was thus a position of great trust and responsibility in the ancient world.

We also see it in the parable of the Three Stewards (Matthew 25). A land owner intended to go on a journey and so he entrusted some of his wealth to three of his officials. To one he gave five talents; to another he gave two talents, and to the last he gave one talent- "each according to his ability." It was expected that each would endeavor to further the interests of the owner which two of the three did.

It was this concept that Paul had in mind when he said, "Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God..." Do you understand the implication of this statement? We've seen in past years that the church/the people of God is Christ's most valuable possession. In Ephesians 5:32 we learn that the church is His bride. From 1 Timothy 3:15 we learn that God positioned the church in this world to be "the pillar and support of the truth." From Revelation 19 we learn that the purpose behind the Second Coming of Christ is the consummation of the marriage between Christ and His bride, the church! With this we are not surprised to read the dire warning:

1 Corinthians 3:17, "If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple

of God is holy, and that is what you are.”

Accordingly, for Paul to articulate the truth that the church has been entrusted to all “ministers” (which is a general word which would encompass both the elder and deacon) should make all officers in Christ’s church pause and sit up in their seats. See, the issue is NOT are they a steward of the body entrusted to their care? BUT what kind of steward are they: faithful or faithless?

Many para-church and other campus ministries use Ezekiel 33 to shame individuals into sharing their faith with non-Christians.

Ezekiel 33:7-9, “Now as for you, son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; so you will hear a message from My mouth, and give them warning from Me. When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you shall surely die,’ and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require from your hand. But if you on your part warn a wicked man to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he will die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your life.”

From this it is generally understood that if you clam up and in shame refuse to share Christ, then you will be in dire trouble on the Last Day. Yet, like many other passages which oft-times are misused in the context of evangelism or discipleship (e.g., Revelation. 3:15-16), you must see that this passage is NOT talking about the non-Christian, but the unrepentant Christian! In the prophets, the designation “wicked” primarily references those in the body of Christ who refuse to give up their sin. This passage was written NOT to exhort the people of God to evangelize their neighbors, BUT to take seriously the stewardship given to them by God in the body of Christ.

Ezekiel 33:7-9, “Now as for you, son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; so you will hear a message from My mouth, and give them warning from Me...”

Truly, when WE come to understand the “fine print” that comes with a saving relationship with Christ, that the Lord expects us to use our gifts and calling for the welfare of His Bride, we become sober-minded men and women. And when AN OFFICER of Christ’s church comes to understand that God gave them gifts and a calling NOT so that they could be fulfilled, honored in the gates, or be challenged with the care of others BUT so that they might ready the body of Christ for its wedding day, they will be held accountable on the Last Day for the welfare of the church entrusted to them and they will become driven and burdened to fulfill their calling. Paul saw this:

1 Corinthians 9:16-17, “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me.”

Dr. John MacArthur wrote of this passage:

‘I am under compulsion’ is strong language. ‘Woe is me’ is even stronger. [Paul] operated under the knowledge of a divine mandate that was not even voluntary initially. All who are called... should feel the compulsion, the fear of judgment, and the sense of stewardship Paul felt. (Dr. John MacArthur, 1992, pp. 71-72)

A third characteristic of the deacon is his sense of obligation. He ministers NOT out of convenience or even strength, BUT the conviction that to do anything else would be to hold God in contempt. Truly, when it comes to the man called by God to preach, we read this:

Jeremiah 23:28, “The [false-] prophet who has a dream may relate *his* dream, but let him who has My word speak My word in truth...”

And so must be the conviction of men called and gifted by God for the Ministry of Mercy! They must serve NOT out of convenience, BUT conviction!

### **The Goal of the Deacon’s Ministry**

Colossians 1:25c, “Of *this church* I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit...”

This is quite a striking statement. God bestowed upon Paul a stewardship in the form of the body of Christ by which Paul was to labor for the church’s benefit.

Colossians 1:25: “according to the stewardship from God given to me unto you [or for you].”

This ought not to be a surprise when we consider that EVERY spiritual gift granted to the believer is intended for the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:7; 1 Peter 4:10). In light of this, it makes perfect sense that the calling that God places on the lives of those whom He entrusts with His bride would also be church-focused!

This is a stark contrast between what is preached in many places today and what is proclaimed throughout God’s word. God’s intention in saving you, gifting you, and/or calling you was not for your personal fulfillment. God didn’t save you to make you happy in this state of sin and misery. Rather, everything that God is doing in your life in the here and now is for the benefit/blessing of another.

We need to come to grips with this for it could mean the difference between washing out of ministry or staying in the ministry year in and year out in the face of trial, difficulty, and persecution. Why ought we to remain in the ministry? Why ought we to persist in the calling that God has placed on our life year in and year out? Because it is so fulfilling, gratifying, or personally rewarding? No, we maintain our faithfulness because we understand that ours is a higher calling than self-preservation, ours is a calling of presenting others mature in Christ!

Colossians 1:25, “Of *this church* I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit...”

This ought to be the goal of all office bearers, much less deacons. Accordingly, the office-bearers of Christ’s church must live with the understanding that God placed them on the earth to be a drink offering to be “...poured out... upon the sacrifice and service of [another’s] faith” (Philippians 2:17). Yet what specifically does this mean? What does Paul have in mind here when he speaks of “...a

stewardship bestowed on him for the benefit” of the believers in Colossae? Based on what Paul wrote in this section (Colossians 1:24-2:7), we can answer that with the following it included the believer’s maturation in Christ.

Colossians 1:28-29, “And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete [mature] in Christ. And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.”

Herein is the first telos of ministry: the maturation of the body of Christ. Paul did it through teaching which is the call of elders and hence the commitment, “We will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word,” (Acts 6:4). The deacon will do it through the ministry of mercy.

It included their encouragement.

Colossians 1:1-2, “For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf, and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, that their hearts may be encouraged...”

The word for “encouraged” is παρακαλέω which literally means “to call alongside.” Because a person can be “called alongside” for many purposes, the word has a wide range of meanings in the Bible, and so is variously translated as “entreat,” “appeal to,” “summon,” “comfort,” “exhort,” or “encourage.” William Barclay cites an example of *parakaleō* from classical Greek that parallels its usage here:

There was a Greek regiment which had lost heart and was utterly dejected. The general sent a leader to talk to it to such purpose that courage was reborn and a body of dispirited men became fit again for heroic action. That is what [*parakaleō*] means here. It is Paul’s prayer that the Church may be filled with that courage which can cope with any situation. (Barclay, 2003, p. 129)

This truly is the goal of all pastoral ministry: getting God’s people to the place where they, stand fast in Christ and hence do not falter or doubt, encouraged in the Lord. Have the courage to cope with any situation that might confront them in a state of sin and misery. Notice further what Paul had in mind when spoke of ministering unto the benefit of the believers at Colossae involved their being knitted together in love.

Colossians 2:2, “That their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love...”

The idea behind this expression is a unity inspired by love. The word for “knit together” is συμβιβάζω (*sumbibazō*) which means to unite, or bring together. Now in the context of Paul’s writings this was a big deal. Remember, when Christ died on the cross he created a unity which we are called NOT to create or forge, BUT maintain (cf. Philippians 2:2). Again we must think of the peace of Rome.

In Rome, the Pax Romana was a tangible gift which the Caesars endeavored to give to their empire. When the nation was at peace both on land and sea, at home and abroad the Caesar was praised. The temple doors of Janus were closed. And every official, governor, procurator, etc. were charged with making sure that they maintained the Pax Romana. Likewise through the work of Christ on the cross, the Lord provided a unity which God’s people everywhere are charged to keep regardless of

the cost.

1 Corinthians 6:7, “Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?”

Another goal of the ministry of the church is for the body of Christ (each and every member) to have the maturity to be willing to be wronged that the Peace of Christ might be maintained. Or in the words of Paul here, that they would be “knit together in love.” That is the passion of all office bearers.

It involves ministers living out the truth.

Colossians 2:2, “That their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and *attaining* to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding...”

The word for “understanding” is *σύνεσις* (*sunesis*) which refers to applying Biblical principles to everyday life. What is in mind here is far more than head knowledge, but the cultivation of a character that lives out the Bible. We see the passion in Ezra.

Ezra 7:10: “For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to practice *it*, and to teach *His* statutes and ordinances in Israel.”

Now when such a living becomes the characteristic of our life, the result is a “full assurance”- the settled conviction that it is well with your soul before God. Dr. John MacArthur put it this way:

People often express to me doubts about their salvation, even though they have read books on assurance. Their primary problem is not a lack of knowledge, but a failure to apply the truths they know. Truth that finds solid footing in a strong heart and works itself out in love of fellow believers results in deep conviction. That is [one] basis for assurance. (Dr. John MacArthur, 1992, p. 89)

This fourthly constitutes the goal of all pastoral care: that the body of Christ might live out the truth of God unto the assurance of faith. Notice finally that which Paul had in mind here when he wrote this:

Colossians 1:25, “Of *this church* I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit...”

It ended in their coming to understand and know the “Mystery of Christ.”

Colossians 2:2, “That their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and *attaining* to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, *resulting* in a true knowledge of God’s mystery, *that is*, Christ *Himself*.”

In the Bible, a “mystery” is a class of revelation which in previous generations was hidden from the people of God, but now has been made known (cf. Ephesians 3). The “mystery” referenced here is the

glorious person and work of Christ! Now what is it that was unknown to the people of God which subsequent revelation fully disclosed? While we might be able to supply a list, Paul is quite specific here.

Colossians 2:3, "In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

Christ is both the wisdom of God and the knowledge of God. In other words, He is not the avenue whereby these might come to the believer from God. He Himself is these things.

1 Corinthians 1:30, "But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and [this is expegetical given to explain what Paul meant by the "wisdom from God." Hence we translate the "and" as "that is..."] righteousness and sanctification, and redemption."

That is what Paul clearly is referencing here. What is it that Paul longed for when it came to the believers in Colossae? That they come to have an intimate and every growing knowledge of Christ: His Redemption, Justification, and Sanctification. This constitutes another important goal of pastoral care!

Now again, as elders and deacons are given to the church unto the same end, all of what we have just seen represents nothing less than the goal of the deacon's ministry. Truly the deacon that is content with...

- Facility maintenance.
- Handing out money.
- Overseeing a food closet.
- Maintaining and presenting the budget of the congregation.

Is aiming way short of his purpose and calling in the body. They must be content with nothing less than the body of Christ becoming all that God has called it to be. It is for this we labor and strive! Yet and again, the vehicle/means to these ends differs according to the gifts and calling of God. The elders will utilize the ministry of the Word and Prayer (which again is a reference primarily to corporate worship) and the deacons will utilize the ministry of mercy. Yet both offices will labor and strive together to present to God a bride "...having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless" (Ephesians 5:27).

## Works Cited

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### **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on March 4, 2012. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church