

May 22, 2011

*"The Calling of an Elder, the Character of a Deacon"*

Acts 20:28-32; Acts 6:1-10

We know in Acts 20:17-38 Paul is speaking to the Ephesian elders because verse :17 tells us –

**From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. (Acts 20:17 NKJ)**

He first recounts to them his own ministry yet in the verses we will consider today he speaks to them regarding their own ministry –

*I. Take heed to yourselves – :28*

1. *This is actually a good word for anyone in leadership in the church –*

A. *Becoming an elder, deacon, pastor, missionary, Sunday School teacher, WIC Leader, etc... whatever position a person may have, the position itself does not make that person automatically more "HOLY" the famous missionary writer Elizabeth Elliot used to joke "missionaries don't walk, they tread the burning sands..." as if becoming one made a person automatically more holy, less likely to sin ...*

**Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. (1 Corinthians 10:12 NKJ)**

B. *The position of elder has its own particular temptations – pride, abuse of leadership, etc... the devil delights in making leaders fall!*

C. *We need to abide in Christ –*

**"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. (John 15:5 NKJ)**

- *Reading God's Word, daily*
- *Praying without ceasing*
- *Confessing our own sins*
- *Guarding ourselves from temptations*

*II. And (take heed) to all the flock - :28*

**"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:28 NKJ)**

1. *Elders are "oversee" and "shepherd" the church*
2. *This is a calling not only from the church, but from the "Holy Spirit"*
3. *Note Paul would have these Ephesian elders understand the great value of God's people – "which He purchased with His own blood."*

- *This fact should make us feel the weight, the importance of this position.*
- *The importance we each have in the sight of God!*

*III. The REASON such care is needed –*

**"For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.<sup>30</sup> "Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.<sup>31</sup> "Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. (Acts 20:29-31 NKJ)**

1. *The wolves referred to here are false teachers*
2. *One of the main duties of elders is maintaining sound doctrine*
3. *Reading church history this has been the downfall of nearly every distinctive part of Christ's body*

*IV. Where Paul's confidence was and where ours should be –*

**"So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (Acts 20:32 NKJ)**

1. *Not in mere men, even the best of men*
2. *But in God and His Word*

*Now, today we are considering not only an elder but a deacon, so this is really two sermons in one –*

*V. The word "deacon" means servant –  
249 δῆκονος diakonos {dee-ak'-on-os}*

Meaning: 1) one who executes the commands of another, esp. of a master, a servant, attendant, minister 1a) the servant of a king 1b) a deacon, one who, by virtue of the office assigned to him by the church, cares for the poor and has charge of and distributes the money collected for their use 1c) a waiter, one who serves food and drink

*VI. If we consider Acts 6, the deacons are called to meet NEEDS –*

Now in those days, when *the number of the disciples* was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.<sup>2</sup> Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables."<sup>3</sup> "Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business;<sup>4</sup> "but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."<sup>5</sup> And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch,<sup>6</sup> whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.<sup>7</sup> Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:1-7 NKJ)

1. *Here the need was the need of the Greek widows –*
2. *Yet, the work of a deacon involves noticing / meeting needs in many places, in a variety of ways, as Michael has already made known to us and led in pointing out the needs in Ukraine!*

*VII. Note, Deacons were also called to a high calling, full of the Holy Spirit –*

"Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; (Acts 6:3 NKJ)

And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, (Acts 6:5 NKJ)

1. *Good reputation'*
2. *Full of the Holy Spirit*
3. *Wise*

*VIII. Note the ministry of "deacon" is not necessarily limited –*

And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. (Acts 6:8 NKJ)

Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen.<sup>10</sup> And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. (Acts 6:9-10 NKJ)

*IX. Stephen (the deacon) is the first (recorded) in the early church, to give his life for Christ –*

*1. Note the end of his bold sermon –*

"You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did*, so *do you*."<sup>52</sup> "Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers,<sup>53</sup> "who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept *it*." (Acts 7:51-53 NKJ)

*2. He died a martyr's death –*

When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with *their teeth*.<sup>55</sup> But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God,<sup>56</sup> and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"<sup>57</sup> Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord;<sup>58</sup> and they cast *him* out of the city and stoned *him*. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.<sup>59</sup> And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."<sup>60</sup> Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. (Acts 7:54-60 NKJ)

- *Understand the original meaning of the word "martyr"- witness*
- *See Stephen's peace*
- *Notice Christ-like forgiveness*
- *Note, Saul, who later was converted, Paul, witnessed Stephen's death!*