

## Office of Deacon (#3 Solution) – Acts 6:1-7

### I. Introduction:

- A. I'm sure you remember the family of **Lazarus** and his two sisters, **Mary** and **Martha**.
1. In **Luke 10** we are told about a dinner hosted by Martha, which included Jesus and His disciples.
  2. I can just imagine the pressure Martha felt about feeding the Saviour and His disciples.
  3. Mary, Martha's younger sister, wasn't much help, choosing to sit at Jesus' feet to hear His instruction.
  4. *"But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me" – Luke 10:40.*
  5. *"Left me to serve alone" includes the word "diakonia" (dee-ak-on-EE'-ah). "I'm the only acting deaconess."*
  6. *"And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."*
- B. I see a parallel between that **dinner at Martha's house** and the work being done in the **House of God**.
1. The Apostles were being expected to handle both the spiritual and secular responsibilities of the feast.
  2. And some of the Helenists in the church were complaining that their tables weren't been serve properly.
  3. *"Lord, dost thou not care that some of our widows are being neglected? Bid your apostles therefore that they help them."*

### II. In both Luke 10 and Acts 6 we see **TWO KINDS of MINISTRATIONS or service.**

- A. Somehow **the TWELVE Apostles** learned of the murmuring of the Grecian part of the membership.
1. I know that some people don't like the fact that **Matthias** became one of the twelve.
  2. Some commentators and preachers insist that Paul became the twelfth Apostle, and that Matthias was an interloper.
  3. But I have to listen to God's Word, and it says there were twelve before the salvation of Saul/Paul.
  4. And I also acknowledge the will of the church and the leadership of the Spirit in **Acts 1**, when Matthias was chosen to replace Judas.
  5. Some people like to criticize what other autonomous churches do, but we have no right to do that.
- B. *"Then the TWELVE called the multitude of the disciples unto them."*
1. Please don't ask me how exactly this was done, because I don't have an explanation.
  2. Some say, it was only the 120 who met with the Apostles, but that's not what the Bible says.
  3. Others suggest that the church in Jerusalem, had begun gathering in homes and halls in smaller groups.
    - a. They say the congregation was now split into several congregations – but there is no evidence of that.
    - b. These people say that the leadership of the several congregations met with the Apostles.
    - c. But this is supposition, and it certainly hurts the definition of the word *"ecclesia"* – God's church.
  4. Somehow, the twelve met with *"the MULTITUDE"* which sounds like a lot more than 120.
- C. And the Apostles pointed out that, as to their ministry, they had two primary responsibilities.
1. As **v. 4** tells us, the twelve sought to *"give ourselves continually to prayer, & to the ministry of the word."*
  2. And earlier they said, *"it is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables."*
  3. When it came to the **Word**, they had a **double responsibility** – **saturate** themselves in it, and **minister** it.
  4. It appears that these *"ignorant and unlearned"* fishermen, tax collectors and others, were spending their days in the study of the 39 books of the Old Testament.
  5. When they spontaneously were invited to preach, as at the Beautiful Gate, they were so filled with **Isaiah**, **David** and **Moses**, that the Holy Spirit had tools in them ready to put to good use.
  6. I can see them spending a few hours every day in personal study, and then gathering for prayer and sharing with each other what they had seen in God's word that day.
  7. *"Iron sharpeneth iron; so these men sharpened the hearts and minds of each other."*
  8. The words *"give ourselves continually...."* is the common Biblical expression – *"continued steadfastly."*
  9. They were all about God's Word. When they weren't reading and memorizing it, they were *"ministering"* it.

- D. Notice that the seven men chosen and appointed to serve the tables are not called “deacons” in **Acts 6**.
1. There are some silly commentators who say they were not officially church “deacons” at all.
  2. But that word is used throughout these 7 verses.
  3. “Ministration” in **verse 1** is the Greek **noun** “*diakonia*.”
  4. “Serve tables” in **verse 2** is **verb** “*diakoneo*.”
  5. And would you like to know the Greek word translated “*ministry of the word?*” in **verse 4?**
  6. It is “*diakonia*” once again. The Apostles were “*servants*” of the Word.
- E. My point here is that Mary and Martha both had their own unique ministry, as did the twelve and the seven.
1. For a church to function well, both Mary’s and Martha’s are necessary.
  2. And to keep the Jerusalem church from splitting down the middle, both elders and deacons were essential.
  3. Not only was there **a practical need** for both, but there was a **spiritual need** as well.
    - a. The Apostles were no more filled with the Spirit than the deacons.
    - b. Neither was any nearer to the Lord than the other.

### III. But as we see, the two kinds of ministrations require **TWO KINDS of SERVANTS**.

- A. Let me ask you – How did the twelve become the elders of the church in Jerusalem?
1. That church was unique among all the “*ecclesias*” which would follow them – in so many ways.
  2. One was that in a sense the church leadership was in place before, or as, the church was being formed.
  3. By that I mean, the church didn’t find themselves without a pastor, so they sent letters to sister churches asking them for pastoral recommendations.
  4. They didn’t have several candidates come and preach for a few weeks, while the members prayed about whether to extend a call to them or not.
  5. With the exception of Matthias, it was by the direct hand of God that Peter, James, John, and the others were set in place and given the ministry of the word and prayer.
  6. They were like God’s choice of Moses so many years before.
  7. And thankfully the church never had any Korah’s rising up to question their leadership.
- B. I want us all to be careful with my next point, not to go too far in either direction.
1. There is a sense in which God places the pastor over His church in a manner unlike any other member.
  2. And in light of this – “*it is not reason that they should leave the word of God, and serve tables.*”
  3. It is “**not reason**” – that word “*reason*” is somewhat complicated, sometimes meaning “*pleasing*.”
    - a. But pleasing to whom? Pleasing to God?
    - b. Basically this means, “*It is **NOT FIT or RIGHT** that we should leave the Word of God, and serve tables.*”
- C. I promise you that I will never use my office as God’s undershepherd to avoid getting my hands dirty on some church work day.
1. But it is not reason that I should be here digging, painting, mowing or cleaning the parking lot just because someone else refuses to do it.
  2. We should all be God’s servants, but a bishop holds a special position of servanthood.
- D. There is as reason that our church doesn’t currently have any deacons, and it’s not a good or sound reason.
1. I think Bro. Fulton would agree – because we both descend from the same pastor.
  2. Austin and I are from different generations, but my mentor after Bible school, later became one of Austin’s first pastors.
  3. And because of things which that man had experienced in his youth, he never ordained deacons for his churches.
    - a. He had seen churches where deacons believed they held a superior office to that of pastor/elder.
    - b. Deacons determined the pastor’s salary and sometimes told the preacher what to preach.
    - c. The deacons were **permanent** members of the church, while pastors come and go, sometimes at the insistence of the deacons.

4. Our pastor had seen deacons who forgot they were servants & that their responsibilities were about tables.
  5. The man to whom I refer experienced a few *“Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence”* and were not receptive to the pastoral ministry or instruction about the office of Deacon.
- E. The twelve told the ten thousand, *“It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.*
1. *Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.*
  2. *But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.”*
  3. In the Jerusalem church there were two kinds of ministrations, and therefore they needed two kinds of servants.

#### IV. And to that end the Apostles made **TWO RECOMMENDATIONS**.

- A. You might be wondering why we are looking with such detail into something which took place so long ago.
1. One reason is that here we can see the inner workings of **Christ’s prototypical church**.
  2. And in this case, the twelve told the church – the multitude – *“look **YE** out”* – *“choose you seven men.”*
  3. The Apostles didn’t take upon themselves the responsibility to make this choice.
  4. They didn’t recommend people whom they thought were qualified, asking, *“what do you think?”*
  5. They told the church to make the search and to present their choices, based on three simple qualifications.
- B. With some decisions, such a pastoral recommendation would be easy.
1. For example, if you decided that we need to paint the auditorium, and I said, *“Pick a color,”* I guarantee that I would live with whatever color choice you made.
  2. Now, the church itself might split over that choice, but I could live with any color you chose.
  3. But on something as important as deacons, I would have a little harder time giving away the reigns.
  4. Nevertheless, that is what the church in Jerusalem did, and that is what should have been done.
  5. The office of Deacon was a church office and a church responsibility.
  6. *“Look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.”*
- C. *“Look ye out among you **SEVEN** men ... whom we may appoint over this business.”*
1. Have there been any Baptists down through history who have demanded that churches have exactly seven deacons in order to be a true Baptist church?
  2. I’ve never heard of any, but I wouldn’t be surprised.
  3. Why did the brethren suggest seven? Was it some magical number? Then why not twelve?
  4. I agree with John Gill who thinks that was simply a sufficient number to meet the need of that day.
  5. Can a church have more or less than seven Deacons and still be scriptural? Certainly.
  6. Can a church have no deacons at all and still be scriptural? I think so.
  7. In fact, how long did the first church exist before they had deacons?
  8. But should churches have deacons? I believe that in most cases it would be wise.
- D. In regard to these seven, what were the sort of men was the church to seek?
1. Three criteria were given.
  2. In another message, we’ll look at what Paul told Timothy in his first epistle, but tonight we’ll briefly confine ourselves to what is said here. And this is in and of itself interesting.
  3. There are at least six qualifications mentioned later, but only three here.
  4. And isn’t that a commentary on the way we are by nature?
    - a. For example, historically at first God’s churches defined themselves simply as believing the Bible.
    - b. And then, forced by circumstances, they began to outline a dozen important and essential doctrines.
    - c. But over time, that dozen became three dozen.
    - d. And still later it took a small book to explain and clarify those three dozen points.
  5. Here the Apostles mentioned only three things, which basically covered everything else.

- E. First, because these deacons were going to be administering great quantities of funds, they must be **honest**.
1. *“Men of honest report”* – they must be **well-known** as **ABOVE reproach**.
  2. There must be a **“witness”** of honesty about them – the Greek word for **“report”** is **“martureo”** from which **“martyr”** is derived. The word means **“witness.”**
  3. There was going to be a lot of pressure on these men; they need already to be above temptation.
  4. We’ll say more about this in a different message.
- F. The third requirement was to be **“full of wisdom”** or as T.P. Simmons puts it – **“sanctified common sense.”**
1. Sometimes these men might be required to make evaluations about specific cases.
  2. Sometimes it might be necessary to reprove, rebuke and even to exhort people who came to them with their hands outstretched.
  3. Is it wise to paint the auditorium at this time, when we need to install a new front door or buy a new van?
  4. Should this lady be given this money or should it go to the widow with five children to feed?
- G. The second requirement the Apostles laid down was that these men need to be **“full of the Holy Ghost.”**
1. This is so important that I’ve decided to make it the topic of our next lesson.
  2. But to give you a little preview – **“To be filled with the Spirit, means to be surrendered to His leadership.”**
  3. Every Christian is indwelt by God’s Holy Spirit, but most are not living under His control.
  4. Most rarely seek the Lord’s will; they don’t pray over decisions; they follow their own emotions or impulses.
  5. These seven deacons need to be Spirit-led, not just in the important role as officers of the Lord’s church but in their every day lives.
- H. The twelve said, **“Look ye out among you seven men ... whom we may **APPOINT** over this business.”**
1. The recommendation was, choose seven men and bring them to us, and we will appoint them over this financial business.
  2. Doesn’t this suggest that if the seven met the qualifications the Apostles suggested, they would be appointed guaranteed? You bring them, and we’ll set them in place.
  3. Does this scripture teach the ordination of those deacons?
  4. That is plausible, but debatable, and something we’ll look into later.
  5. All we are told at this point is that with Pastoral approval, these men would be given the offering box, the blank checks and the receipt books.

## V. Conclusion:

- A. The problem of the neglected widows, which probably included orphans as well...
1. The problem was solved with the election and approval of seven deacons.
  2. And again, they weren’t called **“deacons”** in this chapter – they were only called **“the seven.”**
  3. In **Acts 21:7** Paul was on his way to Jerusalem with the offerings which the churches in the west had collected to give to the suffering saints in Israel and Jerusalem...
    - a. And Luke says, **“When we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day.**
    - b. **And the next day we that were of Paul’s company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him.”**
  4. The seven men chosen in **Acts 6** became known as **“the seven.”**
  5. Not the **“Magnificent Seven,”** just **“the seven.”**
  6. That appears to have remained their title for some time.
- B. Those seven, very important men, helped to keep the church on its God-given track.
1. Apparently they efficiently took care of the tables, while the twelve kept their focus on **“prayer and to the ministry of the word.”**
  2. They were a very important element in the growth, stability and ministry of God’s first church.
  3. Are they just as important today?