

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 3-14-10 PM  
 “MODELS FOR SERVANTHOOD IN THE CHURCH”  
 ACTS 6:1-7  
 (Non-Series Message)

Though the word “Deacon” isn’t used in this passage, most Bible scholars believe that this is the beginnings of a more formalized office of Deacon that was developed later. The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy some 30 years after the birth of the church at Pentecost and spelled out the details of an office in the church called Deacon. The Greek word translated “deacon” in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 is used more than a hundred times in the New Testament, but is only translated “Deacon” referring to an office in the church in two passages (1 Timothy 3:8-13 and Philippians 1:1). The other times this Greek word is used, it is usually translated “minister” or “servant”. The most common translation is “servant”. In other words, a Deacon is a servant. In the general sense of the word (not referring to the office), all Christians are to be deacons. Those called to the office of Deacon are simply the models for the rest of the church when it comes to serving. To put it another way, all Christians are deacons, but a few are set apart to the office of Deacon to be lead servers and to set an example and give a model for the rest of the church in serving. The Deacons give oversight to all that is necessary to serve the physical and unity needs of the Body of Christ. Many, if not most Baptist churches are handicapped because the Deacons function as the leaders who run the church instead of servers who minister to the needs of the Body. In most Baptist churches Deacons are more like a Board of Directors through whom everything must be cleared before it can happen. There is no hint of that being the function of a Deacon in the New Testament. In defense of Deacons in those just described churches, it is not always their fault. Someone said that leadership is a vacuum that will suck someone into it. In other words, the need for leadership is so strong that someone or “some ones” will gravitate into that leadership. What has often happened at sometime in the past is that the Elders or Pastors have not provided leadership and Deacons were swept into the position of leadership in ruling the church and then tradition is established and they are locked into that position of leadership and thereby lose their servant mindset and begin running the church. Oftentimes the church somewhere down the road will call a Pastor who tries to take leadership in the church and there is a monumental clash between the Pastor and the Deacons. When that happens, about 10 times out of 10 the Deacons win, the Pastor resigns or is fired and the church is damaged and continues to limp along in mediocrity because of the unbiblical form of leadership and there are no servant models in the church. The church then tends to become “individual rights” centered and a slow death begins. Do you realize how many churches I have just described? No wonder the church is in such dire straits in America!

Here is the point I want to make over and over in this message: I want you see that the mindset that is required of these men called to the office of Deacon is required of every Christian. Not every Christian will be called to the office, but every Christian is to have a true servant’s mindset toward the needs and problems of others in the Body of Christ.

I. The Reason for Deacons (V1-2, 4)

There were two reasons that the early church set aside these Godly men to be the servant models in the church.

A. Because Christians Struggle with the Flesh (V1)

When we look at that first church in Acts we see the enemy using three tactics to try to stop the amazing things that were happening. First, he tried persecution. We read in **Acts 5:40b (NKJV)** “...when they had called for the apostles and beaten *them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.” This tactic of persecution didn’t work. We read in **Acts 5:41-42 (NKJV)** “<sup>41</sup> So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. <sup>42</sup> And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus *as* the Christ.” Satan never gives up, but many times persecution simply draws a church closer to the Lord and strengthens their resolve to persevere in the task to which they have been called. I have talked to

Christians in West Africa and Asia who live with the daily possibility of persecution and have found them to be among the most committed Christians I have met. Second, the enemy tries sin in the Body of Christ. In the account of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11 we read of this couple who saw the admiration and esteem toward those who had given so much for meeting the needs in the Body of Christ. They then sold a piece of land and gave **some** of it for the meeting of the needs in the church. The sin came in their lie when they said they were giving the whole price they had received. This tactic of the enemy of instigating the sin of hypocrisy in the church didn't work either. God severely judged Ananias and Sapphira by taking their life. The result is recorded in **Acts 5:11 (NKJV)** "So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things." The third tactic that Satan tried was to cause dissention in the church. This break in the unity had the potential to severely damage this infant church and the Apostles acted quickly and decisively to deal with the problem. What was the problem? No longer was the Lord "adding to the church" as we read in Acts 2:47. Now the number of disciples is multiplying. There is no way to know for certain how large the church had grown but from some of the numbers given and who that included, we can speculate that it could have been as many as 20,000! With growth there always comes problems. Why? Because Christians still have the programming of the old man in Adam, the flesh, there will always be inter-personal problems within the church. When we are saved, the old us in Adam is crucified with Christ and we become spiritually alive to God. In addition we become partakers of His divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), and we receive the Holy Spirit to indwell us to empower us to obey and serve Him, but God didn't push the "delete key" on our old programming. I think he left us with the flesh to enable us to grow as we walk in victory as we walk in the Spirit and refuse to walk after the flesh. Fleshly living was beginning to manifest itself in the early church. Let's examine what was happening. In the synagogue there was a custom of collecting from the market and private houses every week in money and goods to meet the needs of the poor and especially the widows. It seems that this custom was carried over into the early church. Soon, there arose "a complaint". There were two groups of people in the church and there was some prejudice happening. The conflict was between the Hellenists and the Hebrews. The Hebrews were the Aramaic speaking Jews (the locals) and the Hellenists were those from the dispersion who spoke Greek. The Hellenists were generally from outside Jerusalem and thus the "foreigners". The Talmud tells us that the Pharisees had contempt for the Greek speakers, the Hellenists. These foreign born Jews were often termed "second-class Israelites". The flesh pattern of ethnic superiority (racism) began to raise its ugly head.

This very real and dangerous problem showed the need in the church for organization. Someone said, "Christians become very unchristian when they get organized." Over the years I have been a Pastor I have seen the two extremes when it comes to organization. I have had to deal with those who wanted to do away with all organization. They say things like, "Let's just come together and let the Lord lead us as to what we should do and scrap organization". On the other extreme are those who over organize everything. They have manuals and procedures for the most insignificant of tasks. As in most areas, God's way is a balance between those two extremes. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones has some wise words: "Organization is essential – you have to organize the life of the church. But the question is, to what extent? This is important because when the organization becomes more important than the message, the New Testament position is reversed, and tragedy follows" [Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "Victorious Christianity Volume III", Page 228]. I have heard people say, "The church is not an organization; it is a living organism, the Body of Christ". I would agree that 100% but I would add that it is an organized organism! God is a God of order: His creation is ordered, His inspired Word is ordered (see the logic in the book of Romans for example), and He gives this instruction to the church in **1 Corinthians 14:40 (NASB)** "But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner." This problem in the church family in Acts 6 showed the need for some organization and the Apostles acted quickly and decisively to deal with the problem. The solution involved some organization to meet some legitimate needs and to restore unity in this infant church. I'm so glad that they dealt with the problem and that those offended didn't move their membership to a church down the street; there was no church down the street. Because we still have this old programming called the flesh and a constant struggle with a thing called the power of sin in our

members, we will have problems and be offended. The family is a microcosm of the church. I was reminiscing this past week about my most stressful day as a Father. It was so stressful I wrote down what happened so I wouldn't forget it as the years went by. It was a Saturday in August of 1985 and we were living in Columbus, Ohio. Kathy and I had 4 children with a 5<sup>th</sup> due at any time. Our 4 children were 11, 7, 4, and 2, and the nearest Grandma was 6 hours away. Number 3 (who was 4 years old) was spinning my office chair around and it got to going so fast that it slung him off and he landed on his shoulder. He informed me that he couldn't lift his arm and it felt like something was pinching him inside. Having had a broken collar bone myself, I was fairly certain as to what His problem was. Before I took number 3 to the ER, Kathy informed me that she was having labor pains. She said they were too far apart to go to the hospital, but she was hurting. I made a "leader of the home decision" and loaded up #'s 1, 2, 3 and 4 in the car and headed for the Hospital telling Kathy that I would check on her often as to her progress. At the ER, I assigned # 1 & 2 to watch over #4 while I took #3 in to get an X-ray and see the Doctor. I left # 3 with a nurse and went to check on #'s 1, 2, and 4. What I found is that #'s 1 & 2 had gotten interested in cartoons on the ER TV and had lost #4 who was barely 2 years old. I found #4 wondering about in the ER going in and out of rooms. I took # 4 back to #1 & 2 and made several threats if they didn't watch # 4 and rushed to a phone to call Kathy to see how far apart the labor pains were and then went back to the room to care for #3 while the Doctor dealt with his broken bone. There's more to the story and we all got back home only to find that the labor pains had stopped. My point is to say that growth brings problems. Do I wish I didn't have 5 kids? No, I love my children (and especially their children), but there are always going to be problems because we live in a fallen world and we have the programming of our old fallenness that we have to deal with and so there are always going to be problems. In the same way, the church is like a family, and without servant leaders (Deacons) and a servant mindset on the part of the members, the inevitable problems will divide the church and hinder its effectiveness in the accomplishment of its mission.

#### B. Because the Pastors Cannot Do It All (V2, 4)

In this first church, the apostles performed the duties that were later given to the Pastors or Elders. The principles in these two verses can transform a church if they are put into practice. The apostles acknowledged that there was a problem and that the problem needed to be dealt with. The apostles knew that if they began to get involved in solving problems like this that two things would suffer – prayer and the ministry of the Word. The apostles didn't think that they were too good to wait on tables and organize and serve the widows. It was that they knew that there was a higher priority that God had given them. Right here is the most devastating flaw of Pastors. They get involved in the details of ministering to the needs of the body and organizing this and that and what suffers is prayer and the ministry of the Word. Have you ever heard the old saying, "The squeaky wheel gets the grease"? Needs like the dissention between the two groups are really squeaky wheels. Needs within the body of Christ are squeaky. They do need to be dealt with, but because in many churches the Deacons do not see themselves as servants who are responsible for seeing that the needs are met, the Pastors end up spending all their time greasing squeaky wheels. Sometimes the problem is wholly with the Pastor who just enjoys meeting these kinds of needs. Here is something that you need to understand: prayer and the ministry of the Word don't squeak. Because they don't squeak, they tend to be neglected. Dr. Vance Havner hit the nail on the head with this quote: "Unwittingly, the church conspires to rob the preacher of his power, demanding of him such a multitude of small performances that on Sunday, he cannot preach at all. To relieve that dilemma, the booksellers supply him with a manual for the year with sermons for both morning and night. Grasping at that, he who began as a preacher ends as a phonograph, reciting mail order sermons that never breathed the breath of life" [Vance Havner, from my files, source unknown]. When we read the apostles prayers (many are recorded in the New Testament) and hear their sermons, they were powerful! All too often today, prayer is totally neglected and the sermon has been described by Dr. W. A. Criswell as, "a mild mannered man speaking to a mild mannered congregation exhorting them to be more mild mannered". Let's examine what is included in these two priorities of the Pastor / Elder.

1. Prayer – This certainly included the personal intercession of the apostles for the congregation and the lost. I believe however that it also included their leading the church in corporate prayer.
2. The Ministry of the Word – The ministry of the Word was primarily preaching and teaching, but it was more than that. It also included giving vision to the church about where they needed to go and how to get there. It would have included discipling, teaching small groups, counseling, confrontations with the word to those who were in sin, and comforting those who were hurting through grief or turmoil in their life with the Word. Prayer and the ministry of the Word usually go hand in hand as the Pastor prays as he prepares the content of his preaching / teaching, and then he prays for the word to do its work in the hearers. Here is a good summary statement from Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: “It is wrong to put ‘serving tables’ before the preaching of the Word of God because it is always wrong to put man before God”.

## II. The Requirements for an Effective Servant (V3)

Let me remind you that every member of the Body of Christ is to be a servant. The Deacons are simply the models for the rest of the church. The qualifications for a Deacon are the same for every member to be effective in meeting the needs of the Body of Christ. Some may think that serving is not very important so just find a warm body and give them the mirror test to see if they qualify [stick a mirror under their nose and if it fogs up, they pass the test]. Look at the three main qualities of a servant:

### A. A Good Reputation

The emphasis here is their character and integrity that is observable to those inside and outside the church. Since these Deacons would be handling money and administrating goods, there must not be any question about their character.

### B. The Fullness of the Holy Spirit

To be filled with the Holy Spirit means that we are surrendered to His control in every area of our life and live moment by moment in complete dependency on Him. They were not just serving food. They were dealing with prejudices and hurt feelings and setting up a program of distribution that would be equitable and just. This required the fullness of the Holy Spirit. One of the functions of the office of Deacon today is to deal with misunderstandings and dissention within the body of Christ. That requires the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

### C. Wisdom

Wisdom is the supernatural ability to see a situation from God’s perspective and then make practical application to everyday life. It is not “common sense”; it is “uncommon sense”. To effectively serve, one must see each need as God sees it and then act appropriately in the power of the Holy Spirit.

None of these qualifications have to do with a person’s position in the world or their financial standing. It is men with a good reputation, filled with the Holy Spirit, and full of Godly wisdom. What God expects of the members, He demands of the leaders.

## III. The Results of a Church with a Servant Mindset (V7) [Read verse 2, 4, 7 together]

When the Elders / Pastors are prioritizing prayer and the ministry of the Word and the Deacons set the example and lead the way for a church to have a servant mindset, the unity is restored and the church gets about the task that God put the church here to do – to make disciples. Notice that they are continuing to multiply disciples. That means that they were making disciples who were then making disciples. Not only that, some of the Jewish Priests – the hard cases – were being saved.

### CONCLUSION

God’s way is the only way to effectively organize the church. The church will continue to be ineffective, plagued with dissention, and be spiritually malnourished as long as it follows tradition and neglects God’s plan for making disciples. (3307)