

## THE DEAREST PLACE ON EARTH (10)

### Deacons

#### A. Introduction

1. The Lord Jesus, the head of the church, instructs each local church to appoint a plurality of qualified men to be elders.
2. The elders are to feed, know, lead, protect, care for, and love the flock under their care (the members of the local church) so that as a local church we display God's glory to the world around us.
3. The primary way the elders are to do this is by ensuring that the gospel is preached and the ordinances (baptism and the Lord's Supper) are administered correctly.
4. Correct administration of the ordinances involves carefully tending the front and back door of the church.

Tending the front door by allowing only those with a genuine profession of faith to become a member of the local church.

Tending the back door by removing from membership those who are unrepentant about a particular sin(s). This is the final stage of a process known as church discipline.

5. But what happens when the duties of the elders are too great that they are distracted from the first priorities of teaching, protecting and leading the flock?

They appoint deacons.

#### B. Deacons – are they biblical?

1. The word 'deacon' is from the Greek word 'diakonos'.

The word can be used to refer to a servant, waiter of food, agent with a special mission, assistant of a particular person.

Jesus presents Himself as a deacon in Mark 10:45.

The word 'deacon' refers to both a work and an office.

2. The word 'deacon' is used to refer to an official position only two maybe three times in Scripture.

"Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons." (Philippians 1:1)

"Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain... A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well." (1 Timothy 3:8, 12)

"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant (deaconess) of the church in Cenchrea." (Romans 16:1)

3. A deacon is an official position of service within the local church.

They assist the elders in their work by relieving them of some of practical burdens they carry.

They are under the authority of the elders.

#### 4. A deacon is NOT:

A teaching or ruling position in the church – they are directed by the elders, they are not a second group of leaders within the church.

Responsible for keeping the elders accountable.

A training position prior to becoming an elder – it is a position in its own right.

### **C. Deacons – are they needed?**

#### 1. The first deacons arose out of a crisis.

“In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.” (Acts 6:1)

As well as being responsible for teaching and leading the early church, the twelve apostles were also responsible for the collection and distribution of the church’s funds for the poor (Acts 4:32-5:11).

When a conflict occurred over the distribution of funds or food to the widows with a Greek background, it was clear that the Apostles were overstretched in their responsibilities.

“So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” (Acts 6:2-4)

In order to prioritise their time and attention on the ministry of the word and prayer, the church was told to appoint seven men who would take over the responsibility of co-ordinating the care to be given to the poor.

“This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.” (Acts 6:5-6)

Once the seven men were chosen and approved of by the apostles, the apostles laid their hands on them as a sign of transferring the responsibility to them.

“So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.” (Acts 6:7)

#### 2. Acts 6:1-7 is descriptive rather than prescriptive.

It tells us what happened, but does not tell us exactly what we should do.

#### 3. The pattern of the New Testament is of the elders doing a work until it becomes too large and burdensome for them.

The elders are then free to appoint deacons to help alleviate some of their burdens so that they can focus on the ministry of the word and prayer.

### **D. Deacons – what do they do?**

#### 1. The New Testament does not outline the duties of the deacons like it does for the elders.

The principle seems to be that the duties of deacons will vary according to the needs of the local church and their elders.

2. In the early church (2<sup>nd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> Century) the duties of the deacons it seemed varied from place to place but included the following roles:

Reading or singing the Scriptures in church.

Receiving the offerings and keeping records of who gave.

Distributing the offerings to the unmarried women, widows and to the poor.

Distributing communion.

Leading prayers in the service.

3. Other duties may include managing the church property, running a bookstall, overseeing the website and so on.

### **E. Deacons – who should be one?**

1. Deacons must be known and respected by the congregation.

“Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

In the same way, their wives [footnote: deaconesses] are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well.” (1 Timothy 3:8-12)

They are people who are known for keeping their word – they can be trusted to follow through on what they have committed to do; they must not be prone to the sins of the tongue.

They are good witnesses for Christ in their life (use of money and alcohol) and doctrine (sound in the faith, serving with the right motivation).

They are men who are faithful in their marriages and take responsibility as the head of the home.

They have proved themselves over time.

2. Deacons can be female?

“In the same way, their wives [footnote: deaconesses] are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.” (1 Timothy 3:11)

‘Wives’ is better translated as ‘women’ – but which women?

3 options: Women who assist deacons; women who are the wives of deacons, women who are deacons.

It is likely that Phoebe was a deaconess (Romans 16:1).

If female deacons is what Paul has in mind, the qualifications in verses 11 and 12 address particular sins which women and then men are more vulnerable to.

3. Deacons who serve well will be rewarded in two ways.

“Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.” (1 Timothy 3:13)

Deacons gain a good standing in the area in which their service is performed.

Deacons gain a great confidence in their faith that enables them serve with greater boldness allowing them to expand their ministry.

## **F. Deacons – why don't we have them?**

### 1. We don't need them yet.

The elders are able to do their duties at present and still make the ministry of the word and prayer a priority. (Largely this is because of the number of members who are actively serving in a variety of ways).

We have a good-sized eldership.

We are still a relatively young church.

We don't have a permanent building to look after.

### 2. When might we need deacons?

If the number of elders was seriously reduced and they were unable to be replaced because of a lack of qualified men within the church.

If we owned our own premises.

If the responsibilities of the elders greatly increased causing them to neglect their first priorities of teaching, guarding and leading the church.

### 3. What would it look like to have deacons?

I would expect a deacon to be appointed to do a specific task rather than a committee and for as long as that task was required.

I would expect deacon positions to vary from year to year with some positions being retired and new ones being introduced.

Unless there was a specific project that required the involvement of two or more deacons I would not expect there to be deacons meetings like there are elders meetings.

### 4. Ultimately, the purpose of deacons is to allow the Word to spread and for disciples to be made.

"So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith." (Acts 6:7)