

“The Diaconate Established”
(Acts 6:1-7)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, we considered how the Lord dispelled the mysteries surrounding the Gospel to advance the work of redemption, especially after He poured out His Spirit.
 - a. The Gospel was revealed clearly enough to bring the elect to saving faith during the Old Testament times; but it was still veiled in the types and shadows.
 - (i) This shows us that the Lord is able to save without a full disclosure of everything that has to do with the Gospel.
 - (a) There are certain things that must be known; and certain things that would be helpful to know.
 - (b) But a person doesn't need to know all the intricacies of the Gospel before the Lord can save him.
 - (c) He is able to save through the *simple* message of the Gospel.
 - (ii) This should encourage us study and know the Gospel more thoroughly: how can we let this treasure lie unused?
 - b. But once Christ came and fulfilled the types and shadows, once He taught His disciples for forty days after His resurrection, especially once He gave His Spirit to direct them into all the truth, He made things much clearer.
 - (i) This is the treasure that's been entrusted to us: we see what many prophets and righteous men wanted to see and hear, but weren't able (Matt. 13:17).
 - (ii) This should encourage us study and know the Gospel more thoroughly: how can we let this treasure lie unused?
2. Two weeks ago, we considered how the Lord poured His Spirit out in greater measure to prepare for the application of redemption.
 - a. He granted the supernatural sign gifts to His apostles and prophets to authenticate, or prove, His Word.
 - b. He also granted other gifts to equip His people for service, gifts that were to continue throughout the history of the church.
 - c. And he gave His Spirit to empower them to use them.
 - d. Let's not forget that He's given each of us at least one of these precious gifts so that we might contribute to the building up of His body and the advancing of His kingdom. Let's make sure we use them as wise stewards.

B. Preview.

1. This morning, we're going to look at an office Christ established in the church that not only utilizes the service gifts, but is meant to encourage their use among God's people: that of deacon.

- a. Very early on, the church began to grow to the point that additional help was needed to serve the needy.
 - b. The Lord responded to that need by raising up particular men to serve His saints.
 - c. And because all of God's people are called to be servants, this was also a way that He would place particular examples among His people to encourage them to give themselves to His service.
 - d. In this way, He continued to advance the work of redemption.
2. Let's consider three things:
- a. First, that Christ established deacons very early on in the church.
 - b. Second, why He gave deacons to His church.
 - c. And third, why we should all be striving to follow the example of the deacon.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, let's consider that the Lord established deacons very early in His church.
- 1. In the Lord's plan, a need arose that was greater than the apostles had time to deal with.
 - a. As the disciples increased in number – from 120 (Acts 1:15), to over 3000 (2:41), and then an additional 5000 (4:4), with more being constantly added (5:14) – so did the number of widows that needed to be cared for (remember, many of these had come from all over the Roman Empire for the feast of Pentecost).
 - b. Money at that time was being collected by the church to meet these needs.
 - (i) “For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need” (4:34-35).
 - (ii) This is where Ananias and Sapphira got into trouble by agreeing to give money they really intended to keep (5:1-11).
 - c. As this money was being collected and distributed, an argument began:
 - (i) Apparently the Hellenistic (or Greek-speaking) Jews who had been born and raised in other parts of the kingdom were complaining against the native Jews (the Jews who lived in Palestine), that their widows were being overlooked in the daily administration of food.
 - (ii) Perhaps the native Hebrews, who were distributing the food, thought more should be given to their widows because the money that was being given was coming primarily from native Hebrews.
 - (iii) This reminds us that the church has never been perfect – she had difficulties from the very beginning: even though Christians are saved, they are not yet perfected.
 - d. The twelve apostles, being the leaders of the church, were responsible to make sure this problem was resolved; but the duties involved with discipling

all those new converts and breaking new ground among the Jewish nation were already pressing on them.

2. And so the office of deacon was born.
 - a. They determined certain men should be set aside for this very important work of service, of showing the mercy of Christ.
 - b. Though they're not called deacons here, it's clear that's what they were.
 - c. From this point on, the office continued in the church.
 - (i) We see them in the church at Philippi (Phil. 1:1), and Paul giving orders to Timothy at Ephesus to ordain qualified men to serve in this capacity (1 Tim. 3:8-13).
 - (ii) It appears Paul also told Timothy to set certain women apart to serve on behalf of the church in capacities that wouldn't have been appropriate for men (v. 11).
 - (iii) And so we see the establishing of the office of deacon.

B. Second, let's consider why He gave deacons to His church.

1. First, and most obvious from what we've already seen, He gave deacons to serve the church. Their ministry is actually encapsulated in their title.
 - a. Most of us probably don't realize that the word "deacon" in Greek means "servant." Consider the contexts in which the same Greek word for deacon is used and how it's translated.
 - (i) Paul uses the word to describe Christ, "For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises *given* to the fathers" (Romans 15:8).
 - (ii) Paul uses it to describe himself, "Are they servants of Christ? -- I speak as if insane -- I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death" (2 Cor. 11:23).
 - (iii) He uses it to describe Timothy, along with himself, "Who also made us adequate *as* servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6).
 - (iv) He uses it to describe Epaphras, "Just as you learned *it* from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf" (Col. 1:7), and Tychicus, "As to all my affairs, Tychicus, *our* beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information" (Col. 4:7).
 - (v) The word is also used to describe what must be true of everyone that would follow Christ, "If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him" (John 12:26).
 - b. But we do need to make a distinction:
 - (i) Though all of us are called to be servants, not all of us are called to be deacons in the official sense.
 - (ii) We could argue that Christ, Paul, Timothy, Epaphras and Tychicus, were deacons in the technical sense, since they were all serving in an official

capacity in the church and to the church; but that doesn't mean that every servant of Christ is a deacon.

- (iii) The Lord has ordained specific men to be set apart to serve *the church* – by relieving the elders of the very important work of mercy, so that the elders may devote themselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer, as we see in our text – and to serve *on behalf of the church* in works of compassion and mercy outside the church as a witness to the unbelieving world.
 - (iv) Deacons are servants of the church.
2. Second, the Lord gave deacons not only to serve the church, but to show the church how to serve.
- a. The Lord also gave them to us as examples of the mercy and compassion we are to show others.
 - b. That's why the qualifications for the office are so high.
 - (i) Our text tells us that they are to have a good reputation (both inside and outside the church), they are to be full of the Spirit and of wisdom (Acts 6:3).
 - (ii) Paul tells us they must be “men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, *but* holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (1 Tim. 3:8-9).
 - (iii) And that they must be a one woman kind of man – a man who has only one wife, or more likely, a man who is devoted to his wife – and “good managers of *their* children and their own households” (v. 12).
 - (iv) How can they show the church how to serve if they aren't already faithfully serving others, especially their own households.
3. Third, the Lord gave deacons in the church to advance Christ's kingdom.
- a. We read in Acts 6:7, “The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.”
 - b. When they relieve the elders, so that the elders may devote themselves to their primary work, the kingdom of God advances.
 - c. When they serve the body by providing what the body lacks, the kingdom of heaven advances.
 - d. When they encourage the body of Christ to service through their own example, the kingdom of God advances.
 - e. When they show the compassion of Christ to those outside the church, the kingdom advances.
 - f. The Lord established deacons in His church so that the work of Christ can move forward.
- C. Finally, let's consider why we should all be striving to follow the example of the deacon.
- 1. First, Christ has told us that the least in His kingdom shall be the greatest of all. That's what we saw in our Scripture reading:

- a. The kingdom of heaven is not like the world – we don't get ahead by asserting ourselves, by trying to be better than each another: "Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, 'You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them'" (Mark 10:42).
 - b. The way we advance in the kingdom is through service: "But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all" (vv. 43-44).
 - c. Jesus' example is our proof, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (v. 45).
 - d. The reason He was exalted to the greatest place in the kingdom is because He stooped to become the greatest servant – being God, He became man, and as a man, gave up His life to save His people (Phil. 2:5-11).
 - e. The lower you humble yourself, the higher you will be exalted.
2. That's why Paul tells us that deacons will receive a great reward.
 - a. "For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 3:13).
 - b. Theirs is a high calling, because it's a calling to be the servants of all.
 - c. That's exactly what Christ said each of us should be striving for – maybe we won't possess the office of deacon, but we should strive to possess the heart of a deacon.
 3. How can we do this? There's only one way.
 - a. We have to be filled with the Spirit since He alone can give us the heart of a servant.
 - b. To be filled with the Spirit, we first must have the Spirit working savingly in our hearts – that will only be true of us if we are trusting in Jesus Christ alone to save us.
 - c. If we're not trusting in Christ, then we need to seek the Lord, we need to pray that He would grant us His Spirit and the necessary change of heart.
 - d. Our Lord tells us the least will be the greatest. Let's strive then to be the servant of all, that we might give to Christ the greatest glory, and receive from Him the greatest blessing.
 - e. We may not necessarily be famous in this world if we do; but we'll certainly be greatly honored by the Lord in the world to come. Amen.