

THE DEACONS

Acts 6:1-7



The Deacons Faithfulness

TEXT, EXPOSITION AND PRACTICAL HELPS

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THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF THE CHURCH, Acts 2:1-7:60

The First Administrative Problem: The First Deacons, Acts 6:1-7

(Acts 6:1-7) Introduction: this passage is about the birth of the deacons, a whole new level of ministry in the church. Note the office of the deacons was set up to meet a need in the church for day to day ministry. The head ministers had to have help in order to fulfill their preaching mission.

1. **A problem arose—some widows were being neglected (v.1).**
2. **The democratic recommendation (v.2).**
3. **The required qualifications (v.3).**
4. **The basic purpose: to relieve ministers (v.4).**
5. **The chosen deacons (v.5).**
6. **The official ordination (v.6).**
7. **The glorious results (v.7).**

1. (Acts 6:1) Division— Grumbling— Criticism: a problem arose in the church. Some widows were being neglected.

Two groups or cliques were seen in the church, and one was complaining and grumbling about the actions of the other. One group felt its needs were not being met; it was not getting a due share of the attention and care it deserved.

There were five reasons for the division.

1. The church had grown rapidly. When any organization grows rapidly, all kinds of problems arise, and most of the problems center around how to handle the growth. The church needed to minister to the new members, but it was having difficulty handling and reaching out to everyone. The head ministers, that is, the apostles, could not get to everyone.

2. There were different groups or cliques coming into the church.
 - a. There were the Hebrews, the Jews who were born and reared in Palestine. They spoke Aramaic, the language that had come down from their ancient Hebrew language. They rejected all Gentile and Greek culture completely, and used only the Hebrew Bible in its original Hebrew language. The significant point to note is this: the Hebrew or Palestinian Jews were so inclusive and closely-knit, they despised all Gentiles and Gentile culture. They actually despised and cursed the Gentiles, believing that the Gentiles were cursed eternally by God.

This hatred even included the Grecian Jews who had been relocated to other lands by the Romans.

- b. There were the Grecian Jews who were known as the Hellenists. These were Jews who had been scattered, deported, and dispersed all over the world by the Romans. Many of them would return for the great Feasts of Pentecost and the Passover. Apparently some had been converted on the day of Pentecost or thereafter, and had either delayed their return home or decided to move back to Jerusalem.

The Grecian or Hellenist Jews had adopted Greek culture, spoke the Greek language, and used and read the Greek Bible (the Septuagint). It is probably this that lay at the root of the problem mentioned here. The Hebrew Jews, having always been taught to reject and despise anything Grecian, were probably having difficulty getting rid of all their prejudice. No doubt, God had worked in their hearts to cleanse them of prejudice, but they apparently were still hanging on to some feelings against the Hellenists. Perhaps they felt that the Hellenists or Grecian Jews were not due as much attention or as many rights as they were.

Thought 1. People do and will form groups and cliques. But we must always be open and accepting, outgoing and friendly, giving and helping, humble and undeserving before each other, ministering and receiving ministry from all.

Thought 2. Cliques and groups are dangerous. **There are sins common to cliques that must be guarded against, the sins of...**

- a. being exclusive and shutting others out.
- b. feeling superior and above others.
- c. believing one has more rights than others.
- d. thinking one is due more attention than others.

3. The leaders of the church did not have enough help to look after every member.

Note two things that are essential when this problem arises.

- a. The church must secure more help. It must seek out people who sense the hand of God upon them, calling them to minister and care for others.
- b. The members must be willing to quit demanding so much of the head minister, to accept the ministry of other men who are called to minister to the flock of God.

Now note a critical point: there was division in the church—grumbling and complaining and griping. Why? The lack of enough leaders to meet *all the needs*. The lack of enough leadership, of enough workers will always cause division. Some will always feel they are neglected.

4. The church was not adequately organized to minister to all. The leadership centered only upon the apostles. There was the need for another whole level of ministers, ministers who could reach out to every single member.

5. There was apparently some favoritism being shown. Most if not all of the food being distributed to the needy was being handled by the Hebrew Jews. The Grecian Jews felt that their needy were being neglected and that favoritism was being shown to those who had need among the Hebrew or Palestinian Jews.

2. (Acts 6:2) Church— Leaders: the democratic recommendation.

1. The leaders (apostles) called the whole church together. Note: they did not deny the problem, but they graciously acknowledged that the problem might (or did) exist. The leaders knew how easily people, in particular cliques when they feel neglected, can become suspicious and cause even more problems within the church. The point to see is that the whole church was involved in the decision. **The leaders wisely sought everyone's.....**

- a. thoughts
- b. advice
- c. counsel
- d. understanding
- e. cooperation
- f. involvement
- g. love

2. The leaders declared their primary call and mission. They had to concentrate on the Word of God, its study and proclamation.

Note:

- a. their unmistakable sense of call and mission.
- b. their unwillingness to be distracted from their primary mission.
- c. the church's understanding and acceptance of their mission. (How desperately this understanding and acceptance is needed by churches today!)

The apostles could have been easily sidetracked, caught up in day to day ministry—the ministry of sitting and listening, serving and meeting the needs of the needy. Such needs must be met; it is the church's duty to minister and meet them. If the church had been smaller, the apostles could have met the needs themselves. But when the church became large, there were just too many people.

Thought 1. There is a breaking point at which ministers must put up a guard and protect their primary call to proclaim the Word of God. They *must* above all else have time to *prepare* and *preach* and *teach* the Word.

"What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops" ([Matthew 10:27](#)).

"Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" ([Ephes. 3:7-8](#)).

"Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" ([2 Tim. 1:11-12](#)).

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" ([2 Tim. 4:2](#)).

3. The leaders suggested others be appointed to minister to the needy. Note: this was a suggestion for a whole new level of ministers. Up to this point, the leaders of the church were the apostles. Now a new office was being created to help in the work of the ministry.

"Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest" ([Matthew 9:37-38](#)).

"Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together" ([John 4:35-36](#)).

"Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building" ([1 Cor. 3:8-9](#)).

[DEEPER STUDY #1 \(Acts 6:2\) Deacons](#)

([Acts 6:2](#)) Deacons: note the words "serve tables" (*diakonein trapezais*). The word "serve" (*diakonein*) means to minister, to serve, to wait upon. The men were being chosen to minister, to look after the needy (widows) of the church. They, of course, would not be running to those in need and spending just a few minutes and then turning right around and running out. They would be visiting and taking time to share and minister to those who had need.

The word *diakonein* is used of ministers throughout the New Testament, both preachers of the Word and deacons who serve as ministers in meeting the day to day needs of the flock ([Acts 6:4](#); [Acts 12:25](#); [Acts 21:19](#); [Romans 11:13](#)). The deacons were being chosen to minister as much as the apostles, but in a different area of concentration.

This does not mean the apostles never met day to day needs of the flock nor that the deacons never shared the Word. Both apostles and deacons served in both areas, but each *concentrated* upon their primary call and mission. (See [Deeper Study #1, Deacon—1 Tim. 3:8-13](#) for more discussion.)

3. (Acts 6:3) Deacons, Qualifications: the required qualifications.

(See Deeper Study #1—1 Tim. 3:8-13 for more discussion.)

Note: the apostles had a recommendation. Very wisely, they had met and discussed the division and complaint among themselves. The committee work among the leaders of the church had taken place. Now the recommendation was ready for the whole congregation to consider. Seven men needed to be appointed to handle this ministry.

(As mentioned, a whole new level of ministry was being created in the church.)

The qualifications are listed. **Note:** they all center upon spiritual qualities, upon the spiritual maturity of the men.

1. An honest report (*marturomenous*): well attested; well reported of; bearing a good witness; having a good reputation. The deacon's character was to be proven and beyond reproach. They were to be men of integrity, faithful and trustworthy; moral and upright, men trusted by all.

"And we have sent with him the brother, whose praise [testimony, reputation] is in the gospel throughout all the churches" (2 Cor. 8:18).

"Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience" (1 Tim. 3:8-9).

"A good name is better than precious ointment" (Eccles. 7:1).

2. Full of the Holy Spirit. The deacon was to be conscious of Christ dwelling within him, aware of being filled with the fruit of the Spirit.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).

"Be filled with all the fulness of God" (Ephes. 3:19).

"And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Ephes. 5:18-19).

3. Full of wisdom: able to discern, see through, make judgments. This was especially needed now in handling the division that had arisen in the church. Improper handling by unwise men could only add fuel to the fire, causing further friction and tension.

"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Cor. 2:12-13).

"For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" ([Col. 1:9](#)).

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" ([James 3:17](#)).

"But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things" ([1 John 2:20](#)).

DEEPER STUDY #1

(1 Timothy 3:8-13) Deacons: the word deacon (*Diakonous*) means servant, minister. The first reference to deacons is in Acts ([Acts 6:1-7](#)). Deacons were appointed to help in the ministerial and administrative duties of the church ([Acts 6:2](#)). Their function was to relieve ministers so that ministers could give themselves "**continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word**" ([Acts 6:4](#)). In particular they were chosen to minister to the day-to-day needs of believers and to the needs of widows and widowers and the poor and sick of a church. They were to relieve ministers so the ministers could *concentrate on prayer and preaching*.

"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. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" ([Acts 6:3-4](#)).

However, note a significant fact: this does not mean that ministers are never to meet day-to-day needs of believers nor that deacons should never share or preach the Word. In the early church both ministers and deacons served in both areas, but each *concentrated* upon their primary call and mission.

- a. Preachers were sometimes called deacons, that is, servants.

"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers [diakonoi] by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?" ([1 Cor. 3:5](#)).

"Who also hath made us able ministers [*diakonous*] of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" ([2 Cor. 3:6](#)).

- b. The first deacons preached as well as ministered to the needy of the church.

"And Stephen [a deacon], full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people" ([Acts 6:8](#)).

"Then Philip [a deacon] went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them" ([Acts 8:5](#)).

- c. Deacons are closely linked to bishops.

"Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons" ([Phil. 1:1](#)).

- d. Deacons are to be spiritually equipped for their task.

"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" ([Acts 6:3](#); [1 Tim. 3:8-13](#)).

- e. The office of the deacon was an early development in the church.

"And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. 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. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" ([Acts 6:1-4](#)).

4. ([Acts 6:4](#)) Ministers— Prayer— Word of God: the basic purpose of the deacon is to relieve the head minister(s) for prayer and the ministry of the Word.

Note two significant points.

1. The great ministries of the church are twofold: prayer and the ministry of the Word. All else, as needful as some of them may be, must be secondary to these two great ministries. Therefore, the head minister must give his life to these two ministries and not be distracted or diverted from them.

- a. It is in prayer that the believer reaches up and talks to God. Above all others the leader must live on his face before God, sharing with God and pleading with Him in behalf of the dear flock of God.

"What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the Spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" ([Matthew 26:40-41](#)).

"Men ought always to pray, and not to faint" ([Luke 18:1](#)).

"Pray without ceasing" ([1 Thes. 5:17](#)).

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" ([Ephes. 6:18](#)).

"For this cause we also...do not cease to pray for you" ([Col. 1:9](#); [Acts 6:9-11.](#))

"Wherefore also we pray always for you" ([2 Thes. 1:11](#); [Acts 6:11-12.](#))

- b. It is in the Word that God speaks to the minister, to the flock, and to the world. The minister must spend hours and days seeking God, finding out what God wants to say to him, the church and the world.

"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" ([Acts 20:32](#)).

"Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries [gospel, Word] of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" ([1 Cor. 4:1-2](#)).

"Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" ([2 Cor. 4:1-2](#)).

"Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" ([1 Tim. 4:15-16](#)).

"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" ([2 Tim. 2:15](#)).

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" ([2 Tim. 3:16](#)).

Thought 1. Imagine what a difference there would be if ministers so lived in prayer and in the Word of God! May the lay believers of the world *allow* and *insist* that the ministers of God get on their faces before God in prayer and in His Word.

"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry" ([1 Tim. 1:12](#)).

2. **Note the word "continually"** (*proskarterēsomen*). It means to continue steadfastly; to persevere; to continue on and on, sticking to it. The minister is to pray and pray and study and study and share and share, preaching and teaching the Word—*without letting up*. He is to be steadfast, persevering, continuing on and on in both prayer and in the Word.

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" ([1 Cor. 15:58](#)).

"[Christ] whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" ([Col. 1:28](#)).

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" ([2 Tim. 4:2](#)).

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" ([Hebrews 12:1](#)).

"Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy" ([James 5:11](#)).

"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" ([1 Peter 1:13](#)).

"Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness" ([2 Peter 3:17](#)).

"Behold, I come quickly; hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" ([Rev. 3:11](#)).

"But cleave unto the LORD your God, as ye have done unto this day" ([Joshua 23:8](#)).

5. ([Acts 6:5](#)) Unity— Love— Humility: the chosen deacons.

Note four significant points.

1. The church acted in love and humility. Neither the apostles nor anyone else had ruffled feelings. The apostles and Hebrew believers (thousands of them) responded in love and humility. Everyone of the seven men chosen were *Grecian Jews*. Their names were Greek, not Jewish. The *largest* segment of the church had humbled itself to the minority. What an example!

2. "The whole multitude" of believers was pleased. The body had been reunited as one in spirit and purpose, worship and ministry.

3. The fact that they were all Grecian believers points toward God moving the church out into the whole world. Christ had commissioned the first disciples to go into the whole world ([Matthew 28:19-20](#); [Acts 1:8](#)). Now, He was providentially preparing the church for the day that was soon to come, the day of persecution that would scatter the believers all over the world ([Acts 8:1-4](#)). These seven men, being Grecian ministers, could touch the Gentile world wherever they went—by language, by training, and by culture. God

was preparing the church without their knowing it for the day when they were to be scattered all over the world.

Thought 1. Believers must be rooted in *love and humility* so that God may use them in His eternal plan to reach the world for His dear Son.

"So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" ([Romans 12:5](#)).

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" ([Galatians 3:28](#)).

"Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you" ([2 Cor. 13:11](#)).

"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" ([Ephes. 4:1-3](#)).

"Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" ([Phil. 2:2-4](#)).

4. The men chosen were unknown except for Stephen and Philip (see [Acts 6:8-15](#); [Acts 8:5-25](#)). The point to note is that they were men who had the qualities given in [Acts 8:3](#).

Note the name Nicolas, a Jewish proselyte. He was a Gentile who had been converted to Judaism and then to Christ. Some try to connect him with the Nicolaitians who went off on a doctrinal error and created a sect. There is no basis for this. In fact, the likelihood is that he was instrumental in starting the church at Antioch, one of the greatest churches of all time ([Acts 11:19-30](#)).

6. ([Acts 6:6](#)) Ordination: the official ordination.

This was a definite service, a specific moment when the newly elected men were set apart for their ministry. Before this moment they were not serving in the capacity with which they were now being charged. Hereafter, after the ordaining service, they were to minister to the flock of God and meet the flock's day to day needs. Note three steps in the service.

1. The church "set" the men apart, set them before the apostles.
2. The church went to prayer; the ministers (apostles) led all in prayer.

3. The ministers (apostles) laid their hands upon the newly appointed deacons. (See [Deeper Study #2—Acts 6:6](#) for discussion.)

[DEEPER STUDY #2 \(Acts 6:6\) Laying On Of Hands](#)

[\(Acts 6:6\)](#) **Laying On Of Hands**: this was a significant symbol for blessing ([Matthew 19:13-15](#)); for healing ([Mark 5:23](#); [Mark 6:5](#)); for imparting the Holy Spirit ([Acts 8:17-19](#); [Acts 9:6, 17](#)); and for ordaining and commissioning men to the ministry.

"Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them" ([Acts 6:6](#)).

"As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away" ([Acts 13:2-3](#)).

"Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery" ([1 Tim. 4:14](#)).

"Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands" ([2 Tim. 1:6](#)).

[7. \(Acts 6:7\) Ministers— Church: the glorious results were threefold.](#)

1. The Word of God increased as never before. The apostles were freed to concentrate on prayer and the Word. There was a new power in their witnessing and teaching.
2. The church grew. Many more people were reached with the glorious gospel.
3. Some priests, a great number, were being reached for Christ. Note the words, they "**were obedient to the faith.**" They were obedient in both *receiving* Christ and in *following* Christ. They *embraced* the gospel and *lived* the gospel.

"By whom [Christ] we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name" ([Romans 1:5](#)).

"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him" ([Col. 2:6](#)).

"He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" ([1 John 2:6](#)).

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" ([Galatians 2:20](#)).