

Deacon Ministry

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[0:00] Take your Bibles tonight and open to Acts chapter 6 and I'm going to bring a message tonight that's appropriate for the occasion.

! That you don't already know, we're Baptists, Southern Baptists by identity and denominationally. As Baptists, we have a certain view about the ministry of the deacon and also the biblical basis for that ministry. And though I could go tonight to the qualifications for a deacon, we are going to certainly see some qualifications.

But rather than going there, I want to look tonight at the foundation for this whole thing called deacon ministry in the church.

It had a beginning in the church. Not something that was revealed in the Old Testament. It obviously was not revealed until we get into the New Testament. And certainly nothing really said much about the office of deacon in the Gospels.

[1:32] Not mentioned there. In fact, even when we get here to the book of Acts, deacon is not mentioned here. And I'll say something about that here in just a minute. But I want to begin by asking a few questions.

Just some questions for us to think about. And we probably could answer every one of them without even looking at the text. Because we're just so well versed in this, I think, most of us.

But the outside chance that maybe some of us need a better understanding of the deacon ministry. This whole thing of deacons. And so here's some questions.

What is a deacon? What is a deacon? That's a pretty important question to answer. And why do we have deacons? Maybe that's the more pertinent question considering the text that we're going to be looking at.

Why do we have them? And who can be a deacon? Can just anybody be one? So we want to, I think, answer that question in the text.

[2:39] What is the role of the deacon in the church? It's not as easy to answer, to define specifically. Because there's a wide range of roles for a deacon depending upon the need of the church.

But we can, I think, say something about what the role of the deacon is not in the church. And I think we'll learn that in this text. I'm not going to take these questions one by one and just answer them.

We're going to walk our way through the text. And maybe another question would be, how does a deacon contribute to the health and even growth of the church?

He does, you know. And deacons, you do, you know. Contribute to the health of the church. Greatly contribute to that.

And consequently to the growth of the church. We certainly see that here in this passage in Acts chapter 6. Let me read it and then we'll go from there.

[3:43] Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint. It must have been a Baptist church thing.

I don't know. A preacher who preaches out of this text who doesn't mention that. I mean, even if he's Methodist. It must have been a Methodist church. Anyway, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.

Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, man full of faith in the Holy Spirit, and Philip,

Procorus, Nicanor, Teman, Parmenas, and Nicholas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles, and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. So there is that famous text in Acts chapter 6. [5 : 31] Now, before we get really into the passage itself, let me cover, well, at least one, maybe two kind of things we need to consider in a preliminary way.

This first one, I think, is really important for us. Though we may not really have any question about this, but let's just cover this ground.

The word deacon doesn't appear anywhere in this text. That is, the word deacon used as a noun in its official sense does not appear anywhere in those passages I just read to you.

The word for deacon, well, really, the word deacon is just an English-sized Greek word. We call it a transliteration.

It just comes right from the Greek, and then we pronounce it like it sounds in the Greek, and the Greek word is diakonos. We get deacon.

[6 : 35] All right, now, that word does not appear anywhere here in Acts chapter 6. In fact, it doesn't appear anywhere in the entire book of Acts. It doesn't appear anywhere in the Gospels.

It doesn't appear in most of the epistles. In fact, it only appears in two of the epistles. And one of them is simply just used as part of Paul's address to the recipients of his letter.

That would be in Philippians chapter 1 and verse 1. It's part of Paul's address, and he just addresses the letter to the saints, all the saints in Christ Jesus, who are in Philippi with the bishops. That would be the pastors, episkopos. With the bishops and deacons. So there's the word deacon. And there's nothing about the deacons, but it is used in the sense of an official office in the church. Because he puts them side by side, the bishops and the deacons, the diakonos. It also appears, and you would expect this in 1 Timothy 3, in the qualifications for deacons.

[7 : 49] So there it's clearly identified as an office in the church. One of two offices that we have in the church, elders and deacons. And so it appears at least three times there, again, as part of Paul's qualifications.

So, the question is, why do we not have the word deacon used in Acts chapter 6? And that's an important question. Since we, as Baptists, and we're not the only evangelical group that sees the institution of the deacon, the ministry of deacon here, we're not the only ones who see that.

Why do we see it there? If the word deacon does not appear there, anywhere, in Acts chapter 6?

It's because, I believe, the word used in the official sense had not yet developed in the church.

Understand where we are in the, you know, in relation to the age of the church. Now, we're several thousand years into the church age.

Where are we here in Acts chapter 6? We're right at the very beginning. Within months, maybe even weeks, of its birth. And so we're in the infancy stage of the church at this point.

[9 : 15] And so the official use of deacon to identify a certain group that had been set apart in the church, that has not yet developed.

I think we're safe in assuming that. The official offices of leadership were still, as the church was, was still kind of in its embryonic stage.

You know, this whole concept of a deacon was kind of what we would, the technical term would be incipient. In its beginnings there in the church.

The apostles, and we didn't even have elders yet. Not in the official sense. Who did we have in the church as leaders of the church? Apostles.

Now, pastors are not just simply a continuation of the apostleship, the role and official apostles.

[10 : 14] We're not apostles, but the apostles were the forerunners of the pastors, the elders of the church. All right, so we can see that, kind of the beginning point, the forerunners of pastors.

And so, too, these men ordained in Acts chapter 6 were the forerunners of the deacons in the church. And later that would develop.

And we don't have anything in the book of Acts, or really even in the epistles, about how that developed, when that developed, and so forth, the process of it.

We don't have that in Scripture. We just simply, suddenly have, in a couple of Paul's epistles, the statement of their existence as an official office within the church.

And here in Acts chapter 6, this is the beginning of that. I think it's clear. I might mention a second thing, and this might figure into something I'll say a little bit later.

[11:18] Because it has to do with the role of the deacon. The passage is not meant to somehow identify any particular or any one function for deacons.

You know, what I mean is the role of the deacon must not be narrowly defined as food service. That's all the deacons are for. Wait on tables.

Clean tables. Administer food to the widows, which is the particular case here. So we don't need to take this passage in Acts chapter 6 and make that the sole role and duty of the deacon.

Because it's much broader than that. And it would vary and has varied over the years in the age of the church. All right, so now looking at the text.

And this is so simple. And it's really the only way to kind of divide the passage. And so what I would want us to consider, first of all, is the justification for deacons.

[12:36] Not justification in the salvation sense. But the justification for having them. I mean, why do we have them? Why do we need them? You know, maybe sometimes we think, well, we don't really need them.

You know, there's some churches that could get along without some of the deacons they have. That's not true here. We've got a great body of deacons. We really do. I tell you, we have a great body of men in our church.

But why do we have them? Why do we have deacons? I mean, what precipitates our need for their ministry in the church?

Well, to answer that, what's going on here in the church in Jerusalem? What's happening here, as described here in the text?

It really are the couple of things that are described here. We always think about this one thing, and we'll get to that. But the first thing is, you know, that this church was exploding with growth.

[13:40] Incredible. Really not anything like we would see in our day and have seen in our day. It was incredible. In verse 1 it says, Now in those days, what days were these?

Well, I think the early days of the church. And what was happening in those early days? It says, Now in those days when the number of the disciples was, what?

Multiplying. Multiplying. And that's a very specific word there. Imagine a church growing by multiplication.

Not just addition. But multiplication. And this church was growing by multiplication.

That's the only way you could keep up with its growth. It was by multiplication, not addition. And just think about it as you kind of walk through the first part of the book of Acts.

[14:42] Since the birth of the church. In Acts chapter 2 and verse 41, God added to the church how many souls? Anybody remember? 3,000. In fact, the Bible says about 3,000.

So, you know, I'm wondering if they really were a Baptist church. If they have to say about 3,000. I mean, we're very specific. We want to get it down to the very number.

But the point, of course, is 3,000 added to the church. That's, wow. I'm not sure what we'd do if something like that happened here on any given Sunday morning.

Praise the Lord, for sure. But boy, what? Think of that. Can you imagine a church growing like that? 3,000. That's what it says in chapter 2, verse 41. And then by the time you get to verse 47 of chapter 2, the Lord is adding to the church how often?

Daily. Daily those who were being saved. Well, you don't add anything else but that. People who aren't being saved.

[15:50] At least we're not supposed to. And then when you get to chapter 4, verse 4, the membership had grown to, according to Scripture, about 5,000. 5,000.

And the Bible says in verse 4, about 5,000. And that was just the men. Is what chapter 4, verse 4 says.

And again, just kind of an estimate. About 5,000 men. Now, don't ask me why it was just the men they counted there.

All right? You just, you know, I'm sorry. I don't know. But the point is, if that was just the men, then how many are we talking about here?

If you add in the women and young people, not children necessarily, but young people, if you add those in, you may be talking about 20,000 people.

[16:50] 20,000 believers. The church of Jerusalem starting their day of Pentecost. Peter preaches the first sermon. 3,000 people are saved.

Added to the church. And then by chapter 4, we have a total of 5,000 men. All totaled, maybe as many as 20,000. That might be conservative.

And then in Acts chapter 5, verse 14, the Bible says, And the believers were increasingly added to the Lord multitudes of both men and women.

No number attached there. I guess they just stopped counting. You know? They didn't have any particular kind of mechanism. We're not talking about some mega church in the sense of mega churches today where there's this one massive, you know, church building.

And they all come and worship. 20,000 of them. We're talking about house churches most likely all around the city. I think they did come together.

[17 : 55] At least parts of them for various things and church decisions and so forth. But this is a huge church. I don't know how many. Maybe 40,000. Or more.

Who knows? And so try to imagine the size of the Jerusalem church when we get to Acts chapter 6. I don't know how much time has elapsed.

But imagine that. How many there could be. How could the pastors of the church, the apostles in that day, how could they minister to that many people?

That's hard enough to minister to a church of this size. For one man to do that. And I would even say impossible. But imagine this. Now forget for a moment the problem that arose in the church. We're going to get to that. But all things, if all things are equal, no problems, everything's fine. How could these men manage it all? Well, there's no way they could.

[19 : 01] And so God sends a little bump in the road for them. Or God sends a little rain on their picnic. Or God puts a fly in their ointment.

And God does this. And He does so to lead them to the next step in church organization. And He's got this all planned out. God's very methodical.

Very organized. Very systematic. I mean, just look how He put the universe together. It's not just up there, you know, helter-skelter. Willy-nilly. You know, things just moving wherever.

Everything's in perfect order. And that's God. And so God is leading His church. Moving them along to develop and so forth. And so God does this.

But I believe He uses Satan to do it. See, Satan has been trying to destroy the church ever since it began. Even before it began.

[20 : 01] Trying to destroy the Savior before He could die for us. And so Satan has been trying, you know, to use several tactics to destroy the church.

In its infancy especially. And he's still trying to do it. But especially then. And the first tactic he used was persecution. He used persecution against the church in Acts chapter 4.

And what was the result? We've already kind of looked at these passages. I've mentioned them. The result was not destruction but growth. Persecution actually worked out for the health of the church and the growth of the church.

In Acts chapter 4 verse 4. Many of those who heard the word believed. And so, you know, that didn't work. And so what did he do next? He used sin in the church.

He kind of inspired Ananias and Sapphira to do what they did. To lie to the Holy Spirit. Introduced sin into the church. And so I guess that worked, didn't it?

[21 : 07] The church was destroyed. No. The opposite happened again. The church grew. It grew. Chapter 5 verse 14. Believers were increasingly added to the church.

I quoted that a moment ago. And so now here in chapter 6. He's going to use a different tactic. And what is it this time? It's discord in the church. Disunity.

Discord. Dissatisfaction. Fighting. Between one another. There are two factions in the church. But, as we shall see, of course, the result was again what?

Growth of the church. Growth of the church. Acts chapter 6 verse 7. And the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem. Greatly.

Just keeps on going. That did not make, of course, did not make the crisis any less intense. And a problem. Didn't hurt any less.

[22 : 10] Just because this was God's plan. To wake them up. And to move them toward another step. In organizing the church.

It was still very difficult. And so what was the discord in the church? What was it all about? Well, verse 1 says, There arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists.

The Hellenists were complaining toward the Hebrews. There was discord. These two groups. They were both Jews.

But the Hebrews would be those who had lived all along there in Jerusalem or somewhere in Palestine. They'd been in the country, in the area of Israel.

And they were faithful. And they were Hebrew speaking. And they read from the Hebrew Bible. Or they didn't read it. They didn't have a copy of it. But that was the scripture they used. The Hebrew Bible.

[23 : 10] But now the Hellenists, they were a little bit different. They were still Jews. But they were Hellenistic Jews. They were Greek speaking Jews. They had been a part of what's called technically the Diaspora.

A certain number of Jews over the history of Israel who had left Israel. Left the land. Either were expelled or moved or pushed out.

And they settled in other parts of the known world. Civilized world of the day. And they would come back to Jerusalem at Passover. And they would be faithful.

Of course, to their Judaism and so forth. In fact, that's probably what happened. These Hellenistic Jews had come to the Passover. And stayed till Pentecost.

And it was, of course, that particular Pentecost, Acts chapter 2. When the church was birthed. And many of these Hellenistic Jews were saved. Instead of going home, they stayed there.

[24 : 11] So they could continue to sit under the teaching of the apostles. And so here we have this kind of group in the church. They were Greek speaking.

They didn't... Their scriptures were not the Hebrew Bible. Their scripture was the Septuagint. Which was the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.

And it's more important to note that they were not accepted by the, quote, Hebrews. The real faithful Jews. Those who'd stayed in the land.

They weren't accepted by them. Especially not by the Jewish establishment. The Pharisees and so forth. And they were ostracized and criticized. And there was a great deal of bigotry shown to them. And it seems clear that that bigotry had found its way into the church. Though we're really not told that specifically. So what happened? Well, verse 1.

[25 : 07] There arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists. Because why? Their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. The widows. The caring for widows was a very important part of the church.

There were a lot of widows who had become believers. And their families, extended families, were not believers. And so they were destitute. And so the church served them and helped them.

And there was a daily distribution for their needs and so forth. And up to this point, I think, we're to assume that the apostles were taking care of this duty. And somehow, through some oversight or whatever the reason, the Hellenistic Jews, or at least they thought their own widows, were being ostracized.

They weren't being taken care of. So there was this complaint. And this issue threatened to split the church. And I think clearly, it's implied here that the Hellenistic Jews thought that this neglect was deliberate.

And they just weren't going to have it. Now, there's nothing in the text to indicate this. But I think it's implied. Now, apparently, word of this got to the apostles.

[26 : 21] They're good pastors of the church. And they're knowing what's going on. And so that's been communicated to them. And we know that because in verse 2, then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples.

It got them all together. They had a church business meeting. It was a very peaceful one because the apostles said, this is what we're going to do. And it pleased everybody.

And this is what they did. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples. And they said, it is not desirable. That means it's not right that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables. do this business, this serving of the people, of the widows particularly. And by the way, we do have the verb form of diakonos right here.

It's diakono. It's the verb. It's not used. It's deacon in the official sense. But clearly, the duty that needed to be taken care of in the church was one of service.

[27 : 23] And so that duty was filled by certain men in the church. And so they're deacons. They're servants. All right. So the solution, the apostle said in verse 3, therefore, brethren, seek out,

meaning, look very carefully.

The membership, the men of your congregation, look very carefully. Be very wise about this. Seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

What business? Service. Service. Service. Service to the church. That's what deacons do. But we will, they said, give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.

I could say a lot about that part of it, but there you have it. There you have the justification for deacons. Their existence is justified here and continues to be justified by the needs of the church and the deacons are serving the church.

It's not some new level of leadership, as is the case, I'm afraid, in some churches where the deacons are just simply the leaders of the church.

[28:44] That's not what they were intended to be, ever. They're servants. There's a new focus on service and no matter how large the church, the pastor cannot do it all.

And so, we need deacons. And here, I think, is the challenge to our newest of deacons, or in a moment he's going to be, Dave, and to our existing deacons.

Because, you know, why do you exist in the church? What is your purpose? What is your role? What does this church need you for?

To serve. To serve the needs of this congregation. We're a congregation-ruled church, pastor-led, and deacon-served.

Now, that's a good description of what the church should be. And so, deacons must take seriously their calling, because it is a calling. I know, you know, the pastor and the chairman of the deacon came, called you up, came to your house, and met with you here at the church and said, you know, you've been nominated to be, you'd be a deacon in our church.

[30:03] Yes or no? I know that seems like, you know, I've got a decision here. You know, I can say no or yes. What is it I want to do? Rather than, rather, we ought to consider this is a calling.

It's a calling. And it's a high calling to be a deacon in the church. And we ought to take that calling seriously. And deacons, you should take your service seriously.

And connect with those people in your flock. and know how they're doing. And serve them and help them.

And if you can't help them, lead the leadership of the church and the church itself by informing the church of the need.

And then we help people serve the church. That's the role of the deacon. Take that very seriously. Very seriously. All right, second, I need to wrap this up.

[31:03] The qualification for deacons. There's the justification for deacons. There's a qualification. And there are five listed in this passage.

As a matter of fact. And later, of course, the qualifications for the deacon, the ministry of deacon become even more defined. And the list is a little bit longer. And it's given to us in 1 Timothy 3 verses 8 through 13.

But here we have qualifications. The initial kind of qualification for this embryonic ministry, just beginning ministry in the church.

Qualification number one is they must be men. There's no way around it. That's clear from the text. The apostles instructed the church to seek out from among you seven men. It may not sound politically correct. Maybe we'd like to change the Bible to seven persons.

[32:03] Or seven people. But it's men. Does that mean that women are not to serve in the church? Where would we be if we did not have women serving in the church?

Not at all. It doesn't mean that other men who have not been called to be a deacon is that they should not be serving. We all should serve the church. But thank God for women who serve in the church.

And we've got a whole bunch of them. Probably everyone that's in this building here tonight. That's not the point. But like it or don't like it, and you can take it up with God when you see him.

Probably won't matter then. But God has designed the church to be led by men. And guess what, ladies? That's their role, and it comes with all the responsibility and all the accountability.

Qualification number two, they must be born-again, baptized believers. That defines the church. What the church is, the church is an assembly of baptized, born-again, baptized believers.

[33:05] That's kind of redundant, born-again believers. I mean, you can't be any other kind of believer but a born-again believer, but baptized believers. Or we could even say regenerate members of the church who've been baptized.

The apostles instructed the church to seek out from among you seven men. From among you. That's not only members in the sense of believers and baptized, but even men whose heart is for that church, loyal to that church.

I mean, you don't want to select a man to be a deacon if he really doesn't care much about that church. Maybe he's even thinking about going somewhere else and maybe, you know. Qualification number three, they must be men of integrity, not perfect, not perfect, but above reproach.

Not men who never make any mistakes, but when they make them, they own up to them. Above reproach. These are men that are overtly Christian in every context of life.

Church, home, work, everywhere. Family. Overtly Christian. Not just Christian in name, but overtly by action, by lifestyle, by your thinking and all of it.

[34:47] That's what we mean here by men of integrity. The apostles instructed the church to seek out from among you seven men of good reputation. Qualification number four, they must be spirit-filled men.

that is, the observable norm or pattern of that man's life is yieldedness to the Holy Spirit of God. That ought to describe every believer. In fact, we're commanded that that describe each of us. Full of the Holy Spirit.

That is, we're yielded, yielded, we've yielded ourselves to the control of God. That includes obedience to the Word of God as you know and understand it.

And, I would add to that, you ought to be ever learning God's Word in order to know it and understand it and live your life according to it.

[35:53] Because we're all students of God's Word. And a deacon is a student of God's Word because His desire is to yield all control, the control of His life, private and public, to God, to His leadership.

Apostles instructed the church to seek out seven men full of the Holy Spirit. Qualification number five, they must be wise men, not wise guys. Well, it's alright to be a wise guy once in a while.

But wise men, of course, those who demonstrate godly wisdom. Godly wisdom.

And that includes, I think, first and foremost, a biblical wisdom. Not a complete, whole, full knowledge of God's Word.

And we're all, again, students of God's Word. But your life exhibits a biblical wisdom. But you do think biblically when you make decisions in the way you're living your life.

[37:01] So I think it includes that first and foremost. It's a growing knowledge of God's Word. And that's what is expressed in your life. And it's observable by those who are watching you and so forth.

And I think it also includes a practical wisdom. What's a practical wisdom? Well, it's the application of the biblical wisdom. It's applying that to your life.

An ability but also a desire. And maybe the desire ought to come first. The desire and ability to apply biblical truth to all the various situations of life in and out of the church.

Wisdom. So there's the justification for deacons and the qualification for deacons and then one last thing. And then Dave, it'll be your turn.

Not to speak. I'm not... I haven't... One more is the contribution of deacons. And I really like this one. Deacons are contributors or should be to the health and growth of the church.

[38:08] Contributors. And I know, you know, servants usually have a sense of humility about their role in the church. And that's okay. They consider themselves behind the scenes kind of people.

And that's the psyche of a true servant. But in reality, the church prospers and grows as a result of the deacons' faithful, sometimes thankless, work.

More than you know, deacons. What happened in the Jerusalem church as a result of their deacon ministry?

Well, verse 7 tells us, then the Word of God spread. Now, it was already spreading, but the emphasis is now there was an even greater spreading of the Word of God.

It was spreading. And why is that? Well, primarily because the apostles were now freer to devote their energies to prayer and to the ministry of the Word, to preaching and teaching and discipleship.

[39 : 14] And I would add, at least for a couple of them, to writing Scripture. And because the church was made healthy through the ministry of the deacon ministry, the deacon, or the ministry of the Word and the ministry of the deacons, because it was more healthy, because of that, they then, the church members, became more faithful in their witness of the gospel.

And what was the result? A number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem. Not just multiplied, but multiplied greatly. And even a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. The contribution of the deacons. Think about it, fellas. Deacons that are around this room, and there are several of you out there. Think about your contribution to the health and growth of this church.

Just because you make some phone calls or some visits, or you stop someone in your flock here at the church and just strike up a conversation, find out how they're doing, and then acting upon what you discover, either in prayer or sharing it with the deacon body or even sharing it with the pastor, even encouraging our church to meet a certain need.

Just think of the contribution that is to the health of this church. Thank you.