

Church Deacons: Serving the Servants of God

Text: Acts 6:1-7

Introduction:

Nowadays, serving is not seen as a noble task. Most of us, if not entitled, want to be served. We want others to do the sweeping of the floor, the washing of the dishes, the cleaning of yard, and so on.

But Christ's example is not like that. Let us watch this short clip.

Background:

Same with our sermon last week about Church Elders, Deacons were also present in the early church as stated in our passage in the book of Acts. Furthermore, in Philippians 1:1 (*"Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons"*) and Romans 16:1 (Phoebe) Paul recognized the deacons at those churches.

But when did the church begin choosing deacons? The answer is in our main passage today. Examining the passage one by one, we can see in verse 1 that the church that started in Chapter 2 of Acts is already growing; *"Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number."* Now that is good news. We all want to have a growing church. But usually, it is not always good things that come along with this growth. There are also conflicts.

The next phrase says that there arose a complaint from Hellenist (or Greek-speaking Christians) against the Hebrews (the native Palestinian Jews). Sounds familiar? Yes, conflicts are inescapable because of the differences of perspective among people even Christians. So, what is the disagreement or conflict about? It is about the distribution of for the widows.

This actually sad. Christians disagree with another that leads to conflict even for the sake of doing what is good or what God wills. Does that mean that it was true before then we should just accept this and show indifference? Of course not, that is why we need deacons in our churches.

Main Idea:

In verses 2-3, the apostles convened for a meeting and choosing of the seven as the first deacons of the church. Now, we should be careful about this. The motivation of choosing the seven is not just for the sake of the distribution for the widows. But clearly in verse 2, it is for the apostles to not give up preaching the word of God to serve tables or the giving ministry.

Brothers and sisters, we may lack or fail with a lot of fellowship, activities, and other ministries. But a true biblical church cannot exist without a faithful preaching of the Word of God. The main reason why we have Preaching Elder or Pastor is for this supreme goal—the proclamation of God's Word in the church. Even Paul reiterated this priority in 1 Corinthians 15:3, *"For I delivered to you as **of first importance** what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures."*

Due to this priority, the deaconship was birthed out for the sake of supporting the elders to serve the local body of the church in full submissions to Christ. Three things that I would like to put emphasis for church deacons: (1) Submits to Christ and shows Christ-like character in their lives, (2) serves faithfully the local church, and (3) supports the leadership of the elders.

First point: Submission to Christ is necessary. It means that a deacon is a mature Christian; not a recent convert and shows Christ-like character. Why? As stated in our bulletin today. Christ is the ultimate example when it comes to serving. He is the suffering servant who redeemed us as stated in the prophecy of Isaiah. Likewise, we are called Christians because we ought to conform to the likeness of Christ.

Second point: Serves the church. The Greek word for deacon is “diakonos.” This term literally means to serve at the table like a waiter or server. But hear this out, biblical diakonos means servanthood. To serve is not mere serving but becoming a servant of Christ for the church.

To that idea, a deacon do not get to choose when or who to serve. In Christ’s service, we are available and vulnerable. I, myself, do not believe in a limited informative manner of discipleship. Discipleship is a lifestyle. It got to be living with people; being with them; celebrating, walk alongside their grief, and live genuinely as disciples of Christ. You live, learn, and look at the life of the person and see how Christ work in their lives. I am not saying that cognitive discipleship is no longer needed; we still need it that is why we do theology class, Bible studies, and other learning activities.

When we serve others, we do not choose who to serve nor how to serve them. We serve them surrendering your right for the sake of Christ. That is biblical servanthood. It is difficult that is why we need a deacon, a person, who will look to Jesus intentionally, always, consistent, and depend on Christ alone. Not on what he or she can do, but on what Christ has done on the cross and ask the Spirit to overcome our weaknesses by surrendering to His service.

Last point: supports the Elders. Deacons are not pseudo-leaders but servers. A misconception that deacons are the one who decides or direct the affairs of the church. Indeed, they can be a guide or a support, but they do not take the lead for the sake of leading.

Logically, a waiter or a server serves the customers. When choosing and ordering from the menu, the server does not impose his or her thought about the order; they can suggest and advise but they do not have the last say. In the church context, it is the congregation that has the last say; it is the elders that lead the way; and it is the deacons that becomes the main support or backbone of the church body. Hence the importance of this ministry for a healthy church.

Let us read verse 4 in our passage, Acts 6, after choosing of the seven, the focus shifted that the apostles, elders, are the ones who will devote in prayer together and the one who preaches.

Woman deacon? Luke 10:40 (Martha); Luke 8:1-3 (women helping Jesus and the twelve in the ministry); and Romans 16:1 (Phoebe); even 1 Timothy 5 speaks about older widows, women, to serve in the church accompanying the necessary character qualifications.

Again, deacons are distinct with elders but inseparable. Alexander Strauch noted, “the diakonoi operate under the leadership of the episkopoi [overseers].” But “elders alone are identified to oversee (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim 3:1-2, 5:17; 1 Pet. 5:2; Heb 13:17). “Elders lead ministry; deacons facilitated ministry; and the congregation does ministry.”

Conclusion:

Let us check the last verse of our passage, in verse 7. It bears a wonderful picture of a healthy, glorious, and wondrous church. Because of keeping the Word of God central in the church, alongside the faithful choosing of the seven deacons, the church grew in numbers; they multiplied; and many became obedient to the Christian faith.

Church growth is not based on any strategy—it may help or become a supplement—but never the main reason. The church grows when the church stays faithful to the proclamation of the Word and when the church is kept under the leadership of the Elders and faithful support and service of the Deacons. Indeed, as we pray for church deacons in our church, in verse 5, the entire church ought to agree and confirm too.

Say more about service.

Ptr. John Paul Arceno

UCBC New Jersey

July 11, 2021