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THE ROLE OF A NEW TESTAMENT DEACON:
AN OFFICE TO HOLD OR A MINISTRY TO PERFORM?

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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF A NEW TESTAMENT DEACON: AN OFFICE TO HOLD OR A MINISTRY TO PERFORM?

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Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 1996

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The function of deacons in many Southern Baptist churches is inconsistent with biblical principles, creating confusion at the local church level. This phenomenon is substantiated by information gathered from available literature, surveys, and personal interviews with professors, pastors and deacons. The purpose of this paper is to present a biblical and historical basis for the diaconate and to provide successful deacon ministries as positive role models. Two church offices are recognized--pastor/elder/overseer and deacon. Deacons are not elders or overseers. When they attempt to perform as such, administrating church business, they are functionally violating New Testament principle and practice.

Abstract length: 99 words.

Ταῦτά σοι γράφω ἐλπίζων ἐλθεῖν πρὸς σὲ ἐν τάχει· 15 ἐὰν δὲ βραδύνω, ἵνα εἰδῆς πῶς δεῖ ἐν οἴκῳ θεοῦ ἀναστρέφεσθαι, ἣτις ἐστὶν ἐκκλησία θεοῦ ζώντος, στῦλος καὶ ἐδραίωμα τῆς ἀληθείας.

ΠΡΟΣ ΤΙΜΟΘΕΟΝ Α' 3:14-15

These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; {15} but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

1 Timothy 3:14-15, NKJV

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. {2} 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. {3} "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; {4} "but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." {5} And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, {6} whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. {7} 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.

Acts 6:1-7

A Biblical Foundation for the Deacon Ministry

The Origin of the Deacon Ministry

The need for deacons came early in the life of the church. According to Acts 6:1-7,¹ the first deacons were selected only five years after Jesus had suffered the agonizing

¹ Contrary to this view, some believe the incident recorded in Acts 6:1-7 is the setting aside of Hellenistic preachers, not deacons. Nonetheless, this passage is best understood as presenting the origin of the deacon ministry. This event, then, serves as a model for the more formalized office of deacon as found later in the New Testament era. For a detailed discussion, see *Appendix A: Does Acts 6:1-7 Present the Church's First Deacons?*

and humiliating death of crucifixion.² Yet, because He had been raised in glory and power, the church was experiencing tremendous revival. The seeming defeat at Calvary had been authenticated for what it really was--victory over death! Many in Jerusalem were being radically changed as they experienced a personal relationship with God. Their sins had been forgiven and they could dance as children of the King. The deadness of religious ritual had been replaced by joyful fellowship with the living Lord. The Holy Spirit had indwelt them, permeating their lives with the very presence of a holy God.

A Needed Ministry Due to Growth

Being empowered by the Spirit at Pentecost, the infant church at Jerusalem took to heart the last command and commission of Jesus: “. . . *make disciples of all the nations*” (Matt. 28:19a). Accordingly, God blessed them as they obediently lived out His will. This blessing was so great, as indicated by the context of Acts 6, that the church grew to about twenty-five thousand people.³ Along with this blessing, however, came tension caused by severe growing pains. Obviously, such rapid expansion required a new structure of organization and leadership. Thus, it was in this atmosphere of revival that the Holy Spirit led the apostles to implement the new position of “deacon” into the church. Under their direction, the church set aside seven godly men to serve the needs of the people.

² F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1986), 131, n. 18; C. H. Turner, “Chronology of the NT,” in *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, 5 vols., ed. J. Hastings (Edinburgh: n. p., 1898-1904), 1 (1898):421ff.

³ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of The Acts of the Apostles* (Lutheran Book Concern, 1934; Wartburg Press, 1944; Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1961), 239.

A Commendable Ministry Due to Service

The newly created position of deacon did not have the same job description as that of an apostle (or elder), but his ministry was just as real. Although two from the group, Stephen and Philip, were in the spotlight, the other five served in the background as “unsung heroes.” All seven were, no doubt, constantly involved in the work of the Lord. These men not only helped their preachers, but they preached themselves. They not only ministered effectively to the church body, but also to the lost world. Not only did they perform practical ministry, but supernatural ministry. Ministry of this type cannot be valued too highly or commended too often.

The Importance of the Deacon Ministry

That deacons fulfilled an important role during the New Testament era, is easily recognized by observing their presence and practice in the early church. Therefore, to help verify the significance of their ministry, several noteworthy points will be made based on a summary of the Biblical evidence. Their importance is substantiated by noticing: (1) the emphasis placed on this ministry throughout Scripture; (2) the evident testimony they portrayed for their Savior; (3) the positive results produced through their ministry; and (4) the later admonition of Paul to continue the ministry of deacons.

The Importance as Shown by Emphasis in Scripture

First, the importance of the deacon ministry in the New Testament is evident by the emphasis placed on its inception by Luke in Acts 6:1-7. Since the deacon ministry was an original contribution to organized religion, he no doubt wanted to preserve a record of

its beginning. Luke also, having been a companion of Paul, was surely impressed by the profound worth that Paul had later attributed to this office. Further, this office was not just a localized position. It started in the first church at Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-7), later spread to the Gentile churches (Philippians 1:1), and eventually occupied a major position in Paul's instructions to Timothy concerning local church organization and structure (1 Timothy 3:8-13). Finally, the Scriptural importance of this office is recognized based on its distinction. Its creation made it one of only two offices ever appointed in the church (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-13). Thus, the Bible affords great significance to the deacon ministry throughout its teaching on the New Testament church.

The Importance as Shown by Their Testimony

Another consideration that points to the prominence of the deacon ministry in the early era is the tremendous testimony the first deacons bore concerning their Savior. It is noteworthy that, apart from Jesus (Acts 2:22) and the apostles (Acts 2:43, 5:12), only a deacon is recorded as having performed signs and wonders (Acts 6:8). Thus, God used Stephen, a deacon, to render supernatural acts for authenticating the gospel message (cf., Hebrews 2:3-4). Again, it was from this group that the Lord received into His arms the first Christian martyr. Not only did Stephen manifest unusual power, he also steadfastly defended the faith even to his death (Acts 6:8-8:3). Next, it was through this group that Paul, the great Apostle to the Gentiles, was probably most influenced for the gospel (Acts 8:1). Further, in obedience to Jesus' instructions, these deacons were among the first to share the gospel with the Samaritans and the Gentiles (Acts 1:8 with 8:4-40).

The Importance as Shown by the Fruitful Results

A third highlight concerning the relevance of deacons is noticed when observing the outcome of their ministry. The Bible affirms that the word of God spread, the number of disciples multiplied, and many priests were saved (Acts 6:7)--goals of every true New Testament church (Matthew 28:18-20). A deacon ministry that is not fervently involved in helping its church attain these admirable goals is not a true deacon ministry. No church can ignore the Great Commission and claim to be obedient to God.

The Importance as Shown by Their Continuance

Scripture also provides a base for the continued importance of the deacon ministry. The apostle Paul suggested that Timothy encourage men who would serve in this capacity when he stated: *"For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus"* (1 Timothy 3:13). His admonition would not have been necessary if there were to be no enduring office in which to serve. Thus, Jesus is still calling godly men to serve Him in the office of deacon. His sovereign strategy to reach the world is still in place, and the hurting multitudes still need His love and forgiveness. Thus, may all who are set aside to serve as deacons realize the continued importance of their mission. The humble service of a Spirit-filled deacon will render eternally significant consequences.

Concluding Remarks on the Ministry of the First Seven Deacons

What then can be said of these men as portrayed in the word of God? Several things are certain. These men did not simply hold a church office or position but rendered

service that was vital to the life of the first church. They were not second class Christians but served as primary role models for the rest of the church. Their ministry did not focus on overseeing or administrating the church, but, more importantly, on ministry to people. These men were not worldly and apathetic but gave evidence of being filled with the Spirit and with the wisdom of God's word. Because of their irreproachable lifestyles and their high level of commitment, these men were the finest examples of devotion among the Christian community. The seven men appointed as the first deacons were willing to serve, even to the point of death, showing firsthand what it meant to take up the cross and follow Jesus (cf., Philippians 2:1-8). These men, willing to witness and serve at all costs, were living examples of humble servanthood.

Rationale for this Project

The need for clarifying the nature and purpose of the deacon ministry in the local Southern Baptist church is obvious for at least three reasons: (1) the evident confusion in current practice, (2) the continual conflict in the local church, and (3) the apparent lack of a clear definition in Southern Baptist literature. To validate this need for clarification, the following examples and statistics will be shared concerning the current local church situation. The illustrations are based on the testimonies of pastors, deacons, and church members, while the statistics are based on a survey done in conjunction with this paper.

Evidence of Confusion in Local Church Practice

According to survey results, one can find almost any combination of beliefs and practices concerning the deacon ministry in Southern Baptist life. In many churches, the

deacons are functioning as overseers. A few, who are more servant oriented, are focused and concerned on ministry to people. The per capita number of deacons ordained in each church also varies widely. For example, one church, with an average attendance of one thousand in Sunday School, has over two hundred and fifty ordained deacons. Another church ordains everybody as a deacon who holds any office or position in the church (i.e., secretary, treasurer, teacher, director, etc.).

Concerning the way in which deacons are actually functioning in the local church, the following examples should prove to be helpful and interesting:

(1) A friend casually asked members of his home church what approval would be necessary to remodel a small room in the church. Each person asked considered that the decision of the deacons; no one mentioned the pastor, staff, or a church committee. This information is significant for several reasons. First, upon further investigation, the church proved to have a "board of deacons," who served as a general clearing house for all matters concerning the temporal and spiritual affairs of the church. Second, because the church was not growing, several members later asked the pastor to resign. Third, this situation is all too common and clearly indicates confusion: the church entrusts the deacons to lead the church but holds the pastor responsible for its fruitfulness. When a church adopts this process of handling its business, frequently rotating pastors will not remedy the problem. A suggestion for this church (and those having a similar practice) would be to attempt to assess the situation more accurately, and then replace those who are in charge. Wrong results suggest a wrong procedure.

(2) During a conversation over lunch with a missionary couple and other friends, a

young man from a nearby church expressed doubt about his usefulness as a deacon. Two things were problematic for him. One, he expressed a desire to minister to people (i.e., hospital visitation, meeting the needs of the elderly, etc.) but was somewhat nervous and unsure about his abilities. He said that no instruction or training had been provided for the deacons in his church. Two, in his view, the deacons' meetings consisted of small talk about business matters and questioning the pastor about things he had done without their "approval." These practices did not match with his conception of what a deacon was supposed to do. However, this earnest man of God is probably not alone in his desperation, since many other churches appear to have similar problems. Over 26 percent of those serving as Chairmen of Deacons stated they were not involved in weekly ministry to the poor, lost, sick, aged, etc. Church members estimated only 42 percent of those serving as deacons in their church were involved in consistent ministry of this type. What can be done? One suggestion for those men who are interested in performing the ministry of a deacon is to consider ways to better spend time in the deacons' meetings. That is, eliminate wasted time by providing valuable training and by planning how they are going to actually minister to the needs of the people. Instead of discussing petty business issues that can be handled by a staff person or committee, get down to the real issue of what the needs of the people are and how to serve those needs.

Evidence of Conflict in Local Church Practice

Instances of conflict in the local church are plentiful. Of the persons surveyed, over 43 percent indicated that at sometime during their church life they had witnessed a

major conflict between the pastor and deacons of their church. This percentage is significant.

An example of a local church conflict is based on the testimony of a Baptist pastor who experienced a church split. Seemingly, the conflict revolved around a rapid increase in membership. The church had grown, breaking all records for attendance and baptisms (i.e., average Sunday School attendance increased from seventeen to one hundred twenty in two years). The dissenting group, consisting of several deacons (many from the same family), became upset over the direction the church was going. They eventually led a small group of members to sue for the church property, an action that required a two-year court battle. No matter what else was accomplished, the church frequently made the headlines in several local newspapers.

Another example is based on the author's own experience. One church he served had averaged calling a new pastor approximately every two years over a fifty-year time span. This is a pertinent point since all former pastors interviewed consistently attributed their short tenure to several men who served on the "deacon board." During the writer's pastorate, when the church began to experience measurable growth, these same deacons became upset. So great was their upset that the pastor was threatened, cursed out, and secret meetings were organized against him. None of these men were involved in the ministry of the church, apart from deacons' meetings and business meetings. The church grew and changed, but it was in spite of the negative efforts of these few men.

Other stories involve similar problems. One well-known Southern Baptist pastor was punched in the nose during a church business meeting by one of his deacons. Later,

because this pastor would not succumb to the will of several deacons, approximately forty deacons left the church. The church, however, changed from a dead and lifeless church to one of the most prominent and highly visible churches in the world.

Another recent conflict occurred with a well-known pastor in Oklahoma. He left his church after the deacons voted three times for him to leave. Due to his controversial preaching, they claimed, the church was losing its “respect” in the community. The church had experienced tremendous growth, including numerous baptisms, under his leadership. Evidently, not all the people in town were mad.

In the past few weeks, three other pastors have been asked by their deacons to resign. Two of these pastors have been at their respective churches for more than twenty years.

These examples provide a small portion of incidents that could be shared. However, these are sufficient to suggest that consistent problems are occurring at the local church level. In the cases shared above, it is interesting that the problems often arose in the midst of growth. Problems attributed to growth were present when the first deacons were called (Acts 6). It is important that those who serve as deacons do not contribute to such problems. Their calling is to douse the fire with water, not gas--neither should they be striking matches. Remember, the deacon is called to do ministry, not merely hold an office. A man who is a mere officeholder is prone to exhibit possessiveness in the church.

The Lack of a Clear Definition in Southern Baptist Literature

Recently, a young man who had just assumed his first pastorate called the writer.

He had been meeting with the deacon body of his church for training sessions. The materials they covered emphasized the need for deacons to be involved in ministry to people, not in administrating the church. Two different responses were noted. The chairman of deacons, a newly elected deacon, thought the ideas presented in the training materials were great. He said that ministry to people had not been previously emphasized in their group. Rather, he had been told that the deacons were to handle the business of the church. A second response, which occurred on the last evening of training, came from a veteran of the group. After throwing down his Bible, he proclaimed, "The reason Southern Baptist churches have stopped growing is that the authority has been taken away from the deacons."

The idea that responsibility to run the church rests with the deacon body has been present in Southern Baptist life for some time. The problem first occurred in the mid-1800's. Church manuals produced during this period changed the role of deacons from one of ministering to one of overseeing the business affairs of the church. Later, this idea was fostered through the training manual of P. E. Burroughs, which taught that deacons were to function as a board of administrators.

An attempt to correct this mistake in Southern Baptist life was not made until the 1900's. At this time, Howard Foshee spoke of the misconceived idea of a "board of deacons." Others also politely mentioned this problem in their manuals. However, more recently, it appears that the literature published has tried to mediate these positions. For instance, Robert Sheffield seems to suggest that the pastor and deacons have equal responsibility for overseeing the function of the church, though he never clearly states that

position. His position may be based on the contemporary “servant-leadership” model, generally stemming from egalitarian presuppositions. At any rate, though a “board” concept is discouraged, there is still no clear biblical model presented.

A major contribution to the overall problem is the nearly total lack of biblical exegesis presented in the content of Southern Baptist denominational literature. Many books and training programs that relate to the deacon ministry merely contain practical suggestions. This lack of a solid and thorough exegesis of Scripture to undergird the practical advice given has led to confusion in many churches and deacon bodies. Therefore, a large part of the misunderstanding might be reduced by restoring a biblical foundation to the deacon ministry. A fresh and thorough consideration of the New Testament can often solve a number of functional problems. However, the Bible must not only be studied but implemented in practice. Two of the most solid deacon ministries known to the writer once functioned as “boards” but now have been restored to a position of “ministry” through a careful consideration of the New Testament.

Several problems have resulted due to the lack of a New Testament perspective of the deacon ministry. First, is the absence of a clear understanding of the basic meaning of the word “deacon.” According to the New Testament, the deacon is a “servant” who has been set aside to minister to people’s needs. The deacon is not an overseer or administrator. Further, the collective group of deacons in a local church is not a “board.” “Board” is defined by *Webster's Dictionary* as “a group of administrators” or a “council.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “board” as “the recognized word for a body of persons officially constituted for the transaction or superintendence of some particular

business, indicated by the full title, *Board of Control*. . . (or). . . *Board of Directors*. . .”

A large number of churches are functioning according to a “board” mentality, whether or not it is formally recognized. Herein, then, lies a major problem. Why? Because, the idea of a deacon “board” is completely foreign to the New Testament and its teaching on the church. Deacons may be considered the superintendents of ministering to widows and others in need, but there is not the slightest hint that they were ever granted by God the responsibility to oversee or approve the overall affairs of the church. However, that is the basic function of deacons in most local churches today.

Not having a clear definition of the deacon and his role has also resulted in a lack of ministry being performed in the church. People’s needs are being neglected. The problem is due, on one hand, to the pastor being viewed as *the* one responsible for ministering to needs. On the other hand, many deacons are not involved in any consistent ministry to people but are serving as administrators over church affairs. Thus, both according to general expectation and practice, deacons are to oversee the “business” of the church, and the pastor is expected to perform all of the every day “ministry.” The tactful way many churches explain this structure is to say that the pastor is to “lead” the church, but the deacons are to “run” the church. However, this is not a New Testament model of deacon ministry. It is based on a false conception and is an example of role reversal in the church. The role is reversed in that it is the complete opposite of the model provided in Scripture. The New Testament never refers to a deacon as an elder and never ascribes the function of an elder to him.

Also, many willing and God-fearing men who have been set aside by their churches

as deacons have had little or no training, biblically or practically, about their positions or their roles in their churches. They have never been trained by their churches and have never been exposed to positive examples and role models of those who do have a grasp on their calling. Most of what is learned is merely accepted church practice with little or no foundation or basis in Scripture. Thus, they have no clear definition of their biblical position or responsibilities.

To conclude this section, it may be helpful to give a brief definition of a godly deacon: a godly deacon is a man who has given all that he is, or ever hopes to be, to his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He has been set aside by a local New Testament church for rendering Christ-like service to his pastor and his church. This setting aside was not for giving him honor or glory, or measuring his success, or complimenting him because he is well-liked. These recognitions will come later, not because of holding an office, but as a result of the service rendered.

Conclusion for the Rationale

Though other examples could be given to illustrate the dysfunctional nature of the deacon ministry as it presently exists, these were chosen because they seem to sufficiently represent a large number of churches. It appears that some who serve as deacons want to serve as business administrators and not as ministers to the people. If this is true, then the function of the deacon as it currently exists is not based on a sound, New Testament model. Though deacons may become the stabilizing factor in a church due to a frequent pastoral turnover, they still have not been entrusted by God to be overseers in the church.

In fact, the number of pastoral turnovers might decrease if a more Biblical approach to ministry were implemented.

Obviously, a wise pastor will want ideas from all his flock, including his deacons. Such desire for participation is far removed, nevertheless, from the current practice of demanding the direction of the church come under the approval of the deacon body. However, this suggestion makes one feel, it is necessary to put feelings aside and emphasize the truth: churches must function according to the clear mandates of the New Testament, not according to commonly accepted traditions. Thus, it is imperative that a more biblically sound base for the deacon ministry be established in Southern Baptist life.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this project is to help clarify the biblical basis, role, and function of a deacon and the deacon body within a local Southern Baptist church. The purpose of the deacon ministry will be clarified through a thorough exegesis of Scripture, analyzed through a survey of popular opinion, perception, and function, and exemplified by presenting successful deacon ministries already functioning in local Baptist churches.

Definition of Terms

To maintain clarity in this project, the following terms are being defined:

1. Pastor or Shepherd (*poimen*), Overseer or Bishop (*episkopos*), and Elder (*presbuteros*): these three terms are used interchangeably in the New Testament to designate the same office. Therefore, they will be used in this project to refer to the person traditionally referred to in the Baptist church as “Pastor,” “Associate Pastor,” or

“Preacher.”

2. Deacon or Servant (*diakonos*): this term means “servant,” in the sense of a “tablewaiter,” and is the only term used in the New Testament to refer to the office of deacon. Therefore, it is distinct from, and not to be confused with, the terms “elder,” “pastor/shepherd,” or “overseer/bishop.”

Statement of Scope and Limitations

The main focus of this project will be the biblical foundations of the deacon ministry and, accordingly, how biblical principles can be applied in the local church.

The project will be primarily centered on Southern Baptist churches, though the views of other denominations will sometimes be referenced. However, the basic principles derived from the study of the New Testament should apply in any Christian church.

The content of the project will be taken from an evangelical point of view and will be most helpful and most understood by those who adhere to a verbal and plenary view of the inspiration of Scriptures.

The writer acknowledges and accepts the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer but does not believe it negates other clear teachings of Scripture concerning pastoral authority in the church.

It is the writer's belief that the Scripture does not support the idea of layman serving as elders. Though there may be a plurality of elders in a church, especially in a larger church, this is not an office that is to be filled by laymen. Those who have been called to preach and gifted according to Ephesians 4:11 are to serve as elders.

Finally, it is beyond the scope of this project to present detailed training for specific areas of ministry (such as hospital visitation, etc.). There are materials already available for instruction in these areas. The focus of this project will be more toward the overall philosophy of deacon ministry, how the ministry is presently perceived, and how several churches are implementing a successful deacon ministry.

Statement of Methodology

The project will be done in three major parts. Part I will attempt to clearly define the biblical foundation of the deacon ministry. The New Testament will serve as the basis and authority in defining both the nature and function of the deacon ministry. A contrast/comparison will be made throughout the paper between the evidence produced from the biblical exegesis and that of accepted practices in the contemporary Southern Baptist church.

Part II will consist of an analysis of various historical trends in deacon ministry. Beginning with a historical overview, it will also include interviews and statistical surveys conducted for obtaining information to accurately assess how deacons are actually functioning in the contemporary local church. The interviews will be conducted with theological educators, who will be asked to present their opinion/assessment of the current trends in deacon ministry. The surveys will be sent to the following persons in randomly selected Baptist churches: one hundred pastors, one hundred chairman of deacons, one hundred church secretaries, one hundred Sunday school directors, and one hundred WMU leaders. The persons surveyed will be given the opportunity to express their personal

beliefs and church practices regarding the role of deacons. These comments and statistics will then be summarized and compared to the biblical standard.

Part III will be concerned with practical application. The goal of this section will be to examine in some detail three Southern Baptist churches that may be used as role models, having biblically based and properly functioning deacon ministries. Interviews will be conducted with both the pastor (or an associate pastor) and the chairman of deacons in each of these paradigm churches. They may share such things as personal philosophies, covenants, experiences, organizational procedures, accountability methods, etc. Ideally, it will be possible to identify both the biblical principles being implemented in these deacon programs and the positive and encouraging ministry resulting from them. Also, included in this part will be a chapter on the general conclusions drawn from the study of the biblical texts and the practical research.

PART ONE: A BIBLICAL SURVEY OF THE DEACON MINISTRY

SECTION I: THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS OF A DEACON MINISTRY

CHAPTER 2

A SURVEY OF PHILIPPIANS 1:1

*Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons . . .
Philippians 1:1*

An Introduction to the New Testament Church Offices

Philippians 1:1 is one of the few passages in the Pauline epistles where the Apostle mentions church officers. Here Paul indirectly describes the existing church polity at Philippi when he addresses his letter to the “saints,” the “bishops,” and the “deacons.” Consequently, at least two things are significant about this passage in relation to the study of New Testament ecclesiology. Firstly, it provides insight into the concluding development in history of the New Testament church offices. That is, it reflects the structure of a fairly mature New Testament church, especially when compared to the infant church at Jerusalem founded some thirty years earlier. Secondly, it demonstrates that there were two offices recognized in the early church--that of “bishop” and “deacon.” (Elsewhere, Paul uses the term “bishop” synonymously with “elder” and “pastor.”)

The two goals of this section therefore are: (1) to present a brief history of how the church offices evolved, and (2) to present a model of the church offices as they appear in their most progressed state during the New Testament period.

A History of the New Testament Church Offices

The Ecclesiology of the Infant Church

It has been noted by various scholars that the infant Church at Jerusalem had little formal structure. The body of believers functioned mostly through the spontaneous activity of the Holy Spirit as He filled and gifted the church. Their meetings were informal; they attended temple services and gathered in their houses for fellowship, prayer, teaching, and edification (Acts 2:42-47). The apostles were recognized as the primary leaders, but evidently did not hold an “office” as such. Their appointment had been made by Jesus Himself (Matthew 10:1-4); thus, their ministry predated the church, having been initiated prior to Pentecost. Accordingly, George Eldon Ladd has insisted,

Their only leaders were the apostles, whose authority was apparently spiritual but not legal. There was no organization and no appointed leaders. The *ekklesia* was not what it is today: an organized institution. It was a small, open fellowship of Jews within Judaism.¹

The Ecclesiology of the Intermediate Church

A few years following the inception of the church, it appears that the fellowship of believers began to take on a more formal structure. This formalization is recognized primarily by the new positions that were being introduced into the church; however, there is still the noticeable absence of any elaborate or detailed church polity. The first of these new positions originated approximately five years after the founding of the church when seven men were set aside to help the poor (Acts 6). Ladd says this was the first “formal”

¹ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1974; Reprinted, 1987), 351.

leadership set aside apart from the apostles.² However, since these seven are not actually designated as “deacons” this action seems to be quite initiatory in nature. Approximately five years later, the word “elder” first appeared in connection with the church at Jerusalem (Acts 11:29-30). Since Luke gives no information concerning the origin of these elders, it can safely be assumed that these men had been previously recognized in Acts and were well established leaders (i.e., the apostles) whose positions were becoming more solidified in the church. Within five more years, it was an established practice for Paul to appoint “elders” in every church (Acts 14:23). It was during this approximate time that James, the first pastor of the Jerusalem church, wrote his epistle and mentioned the “elders” of the church (James 5:14). Similarly, it is evident that “elders” had been recognized by the church at the time of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15).

During this approximate time frame, however, the spiritual gifting of individuals was still being emphasized. For instance, James mentioned “teachers” as being a part of the church (James 3:1). Ten years after James’ epistle, Paul still emphasized spiritual function, not offices, when he wrote to the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 12).

The Ecclesiology of the Matured Church

Toward the end of Paul’s ministry, he seems to have placed more emphasis on church “offices” (though he in no way discontinued recognizing “gifts” - 2 Timothy 1:6). This can especially be seen in the passage at hand, where Paul acknowledged both the church and the church leaders when addressing the Philippians. Further, Philippians 1:1

² Ibid.

parallels his description of church offices as given in 1 Timothy 3:1-13. In the latter passage, he even elaborates on the qualifications of those who would hold these positions. Thus, as H. J. Carpenter has stated, "As the church grew in experience . . . it relied less upon the emergence of special personal gifts of the Spirit among its members and more upon its appointed ministers . . ."³

These two passages are significant not only because they present identical church offices but because they were penned relatively late in New Testament history. Both letters were written within the last four years of the Apostle's life, being two of his last four epistles.⁴ Philippians was the final letter addressed by Paul to a church (his last three being sent to individuals--1 Timothy, Titus, 2 Timothy). 1 Timothy offers Paul's most extensive treatment of church offices, providing Timothy a guideline to use in the churches after his departure. Thus, by the time these letters were written, church polity had gone through its developmental stages and was now fairly established. These books, then, undoubtedly furnish a conclusive view of Paul's ecclesiology, contributing more insight about what offices were finally established than any other New Testament passages.

Another progression may also be seen during this period of church history; the

³ H. J. Carpenter, "Minister, Ministry," in *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, ed. by Alan Richardson (New York: Collier Books, Macmillan Pub. Co., 1950), 151.

⁴ See D. Edmond Hiebert, *Volume 2: The Pauline Epistles*, in *An Introduction to the New Testament*, rev. ed., 3 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1954, 1977; Moody Paperback ed., 1981). Hiebert gives the following dates:

Philippians was probably written early in A.D. 63, toward the end of Paul's first Roman imprisonment (291-92). It is believed that 1 Timothy was written just after this first imprisonment, in early autumn A.D. 63 (328). The Apostle Paul was beheaded by the Roman government in late A.D. 66 or early A.D. 67 (322-23).

primary spiritual gifting of the elders changed from that of apostle to that of pastor. As such, a consideration of gifting is pertinent to the study of ecclesiastical history. Paul does not mention spiritual gifts in Philippians 1:1, but he does relate such gifts to the offices in his other writings. Early on, he often speaks only of the apostle (1 Corinthians 1:1; 12:28; Galatians 1:1), but later begins to recognize the pastor and his shepherding responsibilities (Acts 20:17, 28; Ephesians 4:11). His comment about being an apostle “born out of due time” seems to indicate that apostles were primarily called during Christ’s earthly ministry (1 Corinthians 15:7-9). Similarly, Luke only mentions the gift of apostle in relation to the infant church (Acts 1:2, 25, 26; 2:37, 42, 43; etc.), but later recognizes other elder gifts (11:27; 13:1-3; 21:8). Peter, being an elder-apostle, also begins to recognize the ministry of the elder-pastor (1 Peter 5:1-3). Thus, a transition appears to have taken place regarding the spiritual giftedness of the early church’s primary leadership.

A Summary of Early Church Ecclesiology

Based on this historical overview, it will be noticed that an evolution took place in the early church’s composition during the New Testament era. This evolution is especially recognized in two areas: (1) the church’s formal structure, and (2) the church leadership’s spiritual gifting. The former progression regarding structure saw a spontaneous church become more institutionalized. The latter progression regarding the elder’s spiritual gifting saw an apostle-led church become a pastor-led church. Thus, regarding oversight and leadership (excluding the prerogative of writing holy writ), the elder-apostle of the early church was in time replaced by the elder-pastor.

A Description of the New Testament Church Offices

A Two-Office Church

It should be noted that Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:1-13 each present two church offices--"bishop" and "deacon." Consequently, the writings of the earliest church Fathers coincide with this model of church government. St. Clement of Rome, writing c. 90-100 A.D., spoke of only two officers, "bishops" and "deacons."⁵ Likewise, Polycarp, who had been a personal friend of the Apostle John, wrote to the church at Philippi (as Paul had done some sixty years earlier) and recognized only two offices. He says to the young men of the church, "Wherefore it is right to abstain from all these things, submitting yourselves to the presbyters [elders] and deacons as to God and Christ."⁶ Thus, the earliest extant writings concerning church officers, apart from the Bible itself, give evidence of there being just two offices in the New Testament church.⁷

⁵ J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (Lynn, Mass.: Hendrickson Pub., Inc., 1981), 98.

⁶ J. H. Bernard, *The Pastoral Epistles*, in *The Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges*, [gen. ed. J. J. S. Perowne] (Cambridge: University Press, 1899; repr. 1906), lxvii, n. 1.

⁷ Lightfoot, in his commentary on *Philippians*, has presented a thorough history of both the episcopacy (95-99) and "The Christian Ministry" in general (181-269). In the former study, he points out that both the biblical writers and the early church adhered to a two office system of church government. It was not until the second century, he says, that Ignatius, and then Irenaeus began to speak of the three-office system of bishop, elders, and deacons. Subsequently, it was the fourth century before this fallacy was confronted and conclusively refuted by Jerome, Chrysostom, Pelagius, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret, and others. Lightfoot notes, however, that it became an established fact in the fourth century church that the bishop and elder were one and the same: "Thus in every one of the extant commentaries on the epistles containing the crucial passages, whether Greek or Latin, before the close of the fifth century, this identity is affirmed" (Lightfoot, 99).

Similarly, Baptists have traditionally recognized these same two offices in the church. For instance, the *Second London Confession*, a highly influential English Baptist confession published in 1677, states, “. . . to be continued to the end of the World, are Bishops or Elders and Deacons.”⁸ This same doctrine was carried over to Southern Baptist life, as indicated by *The Baptist Faith and Message*. Concerning the Church, this confession states, “Its Scriptural officers are pastors and deacons.”⁹ Thus, Baptist church polity appears to be in line with both the Scriptural model of church government and the practice of the earliest churches of the post New Testament era.

The Synonymous Use of Elder, Bishop, and Pastor

Paul recognized two offices in the church, as shown above, but often used three terms interchangeably to signify the first office. These are *presbuteros* (translated “elder” or “presbyter”), *episkopos* (translated “bishop” or “overseer”), and *poimen* (translated “pastor” or “shepherd”). What is true of Paul and his terminology will also prove to be true of the other New Testament writers. The following evidence then is given to substantiate that these three terms are used interchangeably throughout the New Testament to signify one and the same office. A brief comment will also be made about the relationship these terms have one to another with respect to the office they signify.

First of all, Paul made the following plea to the leaders of the church at Ephesus:

⁸ William L. Lumpkin, “Second London Confession, Chapter XXVI: Of the Church, 8,” in *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1959; rev. ed., 1969), 287.

⁹ “Article VI. The Church,” in *The Baptist Faith and Message*, A Statement adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention, May 9, 1963 (Nashville: The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1963), 13.

From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. {18} And when they had come to him, he said to them: . . . {28} Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood [emphasis added]. Acts 20:17-18, 28

Thus, it is evident that the apostle used all three terms in reference to the same group of men. Likewise, his comments to Titus are instructive:

. . . appoint elders in every city as I commanded you--if a man is blameless . . . For a bishop must be blameless . . . holding fast the faithful word . . . [emphasis added] Titus 1:5, 6a, 7a, 9a

Here, the terms “elder” and “bishop” are used alternately. Though the word “shepherd” or “pastor” is not used specifically in this verse, the idea of shepherding is certainly present. The phrase, “*holding fast the faithful word*,” indicates they were to fulfill the pastoral function of feeding the sheep. And again, Paul designates the primary leaders of the church in 1 Timothy as both “bishop” (3:1) and “elder” (5:17, 19). In similar fashion, the Apostle Peter admonishes the churches of the Asian provinces by commanding the following: “*The elders who are among you I exhort . . . {2} Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers . . . [emphasis added]*” (1 Peter 5:1a, 2a).

In each of these passages it is easy to see that the terms elder, overseer, and shepherd are used interchangeably. Consequently, various theologians have recognized that one office is being described by these three terms. Commenting on Acts 20:17, 28, Henry Thiessen states, “Here we have the terms elders, overseers, and pastors all used of the same men.”¹⁰ He further remarks, “These three terms denote one and the same office

¹⁰ Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, rev. by Vernon D. Doerksen (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1949, 1977; rev. ed. 1979), 320.

in the New Testament.”¹¹ Gerald Cowen, commenting on the same passage in Acts, observes that Luke

. . . addresses the elders of the church at Ephesus and calls them “overseers” (bishops) of the flock. In addition, he tells these “elderbishops” that they are to “pastor” the church of God, thus indicating that the terms pastor, elder, and bishop all signify the same office.¹²

Similar comments have been made concerning the dual use of elder and bishop.

Concerning the use of these two terms in Titus 1:5-7, Ezra Gould has surmised that “the argumentative ‘For’ of verse 7 is quite out of place unless bishops and elders are identical.”¹³ Conybeare and Howson declare, “The terms ‘bishop’ and ‘elder’ are used in the New Testament as equivalent . . .”¹⁴ H. A. A. Kennedy has stated that the term “overseer” is “‘almost universally admitted to be synonymous with *presbuteros*’ or elder.”¹⁵ Henry Vedder, the Baptist historian, insists, “It is admitted by all scholars that in the apostolic times ‘bishop’ and ‘elder’ were the same . . .”¹⁶ Again, J. B. Lightfoot states in his commentary on *Philippians* that,

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Gerald Cowen, “The Bishop,” in his *Sermon Starters from the Greek New Testament*, foreword by W. A. Criswell (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1985), 56.

¹³ Ezra P. Gould, *The Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1900), 149.

¹⁴ Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology*, three vols. in one (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1907), 914.

¹⁵ Cowen, 57.

¹⁶ Henry C. Vedder, *A Short History of the Baptists* (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 30.

It is a fact now generally recognized by theologians of all shades of opinion, that in the language of the New Testament the same officer in the Church is called indifferently 'bishop' (*episkopos*) and 'elder' or 'presbyter' (*presbuteros*).¹⁷

Likewise, the terms pastor and elder have been recognized as designating the same office. Thiessen insists in his comments on 1 Peter 5:1-3 that "the duties of a pastor are assigned to 'the elders among you' " showing that "the two are one and the same."¹⁸

The relationship these terms have to one another is also important to recognize. Though they are used interchangeably, each has a distinct meaning that adds valuable insight into the office described. Elder, for instance, is probably the term that more specifically speaks of the office itself. The other two terms may be used to describe the elder's function--that of "overseeing" and "shepherding" the flock. Hull has concluded that, "Their title is elder, their function is to oversee and shepherd."¹⁹ Ryrie understands the terms in a similar fashion; he believes elder emphasizes the office, while bishop emphasizes the function of general oversight that belongs to the office.²⁰ Thayer writes "that the duty of presbyters is described by the term *episkopein* (1 Peter 5:1ff.)"²¹

The term bishop, however, should not be overlooked as a title of the office as well.

¹⁷ Lightfoot, 95.

¹⁸ Thiessen, 320.

¹⁹ Bill Hull, *The Disciple Making Pastor* (Old Tappan, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1988), 76.

²⁰ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 143. Cited Hereafter as *ASBD*.

²¹ Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 536.

This word is used by Paul to specifically designate an office in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:1. Vedder thinks that both bishop and elder refer to the “chief officer of a New Testament church” while teacher and pastor “seem to describe functions rather than an office.”²² Likewise, the term pastor is used in Ephesians 4:11 to designate an office.

This evidence should be adequate to show that the terms elder, bishop, and pastor are used interchangeably in the New Testament to variously designate a common office. However, the originality of these terms should also be noted; they are distinct, having unique meanings of their own. Therefore, each word will be considered in more detail to adequately demonstrate its contributions to the overall description of the office.

Defining the Terminology of the New Testament Church Offices

In order to understand the biblical model of church offices, it is necessary to study each of the terms used in Scripture to describe these positions. By doing this, a greater insight should be gained concerning the nature, purpose, and function of these offices. The purpose of this chapter then will be to survey the New Testament for the meaning of the terms “bishop” (and “elder” and “pastor”) and “deacon.”

The Meaning of Elder (or Presbyter)

A Basic Definition of Elder

“Elder” (*presbuteros*) will be considered first because it is the term used most often in the New Testament. Likewise, it was probably the first of the three terms to be

²² Vedder, 30.

used to designate the office of pastor (Cf. Acts 11:30; James 5:14). “Elder” literally refers to “age,” being a comparative form of the word *presus* meaning “old man” or “ambassador.”²³ It thus speaks of being “advanced in life, an elder, (or) a senior . . . (or, even of) the forefathers”²⁴ The term was used in secular, Jewish, and Christian cultures to designate various civil, community, and religious leaders.

Moulton and Milligan show that elder was used in Egypt as “an honorific title with reference to certain village or communal officers” and in Asia Minor as a technical term referring to “members of a corporation.”²⁵ It was also used as the designation for a priest in certain pagan Greek religions.²⁶ Apart from these instances, the term was used in numerous other ways. Hick states that this term “so familiar to us first in [its] Jewish, and afterwards in [its] Christian usage, had been commonly employed before, in a precisely analogous sense, in Graeco-Roman civic life.”²⁷ Consequently, the secular usage of this term may have had more bearing on its Christian meaning than is sometimes acknowledged. Thus, the following advice is given concerning the interpretation of elder as employed by the Christian community: “for their use of the word as a title one must bear in mind not only the Jewish custom, but also its use as a t[echnical] t[erm] among the

²³ W. A. Criswell, *Criswell's Guidebook for Pastors* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1980), 216. Cited hereafter as Criswell, *Guidebook*.

²⁴ Thayer, 535.

²⁵ James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, one vol. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1930), 535.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

ἔθνη [“nations” or “Gentiles”] . . . to designate civic as well as religious officials . . .”²⁸

However, others believe that the meaning of elder as used in the New Testament church was distinctly influenced by Judaism. Lightfoot surmised that, “If the analogies of the ‘bishop’ are to be sought chiefly among heathen nations, the name and office of the ‘presbyter’ are essentially Jewish.”²⁹ In Jewish life it was used for positions in both church and state and spanned the era of biblical history from the time of Moses through the first century synagogue.³⁰ During the approximate era of the New Testament, the word was used in two primary ways. Firstly, until 70 A.D., it described leaders of the local synagogues around Jerusalem (Luke 7:3).³¹ Secondly, it was used to distinguish wealthy, influential lay members of the Sanhedrin from the priests and scribes (Mark 11:27).³²

In the Christian church *presbuteros* referred to “those who presided over the assemblies (or churches).”³³ Thus, elder was frequently used as a “term of rank or

²⁸ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d ed., trans. by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich; rev. by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 700. Cited hereafter as *BAGD*.

²⁹ Lightfoot, 96. Lightfoot saw the *episkopos* as being of Greek origin (95), the *diakonos* as being completely new and unique to the early church at Jerusalem (189), and the *presbuteros* as being adopted from the Jewish synagogue (96).

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *BAGD*, 700.

³² *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, Currently available only in electronic form (Copyright by Timothy and Barbara Friberg, 1994), s. v. “πρεσβύτερος.” Cited hereafter as *ANLEX*. *ANLEX* material is taken from *BibleWorks for Windows*, version 3.0 (Big Fork, MT.: Hermeneutika; Copyright by Michael S. Bushell, 1992-1995).

³³ Thayer, 536.

office.”³⁴ It is clear, however, that age is not the primary focus of the word when used in the New Testament to describe the pastor; this is shown by Paul’s instructions to Timothy concerning his youthfulness (1 Timothy 4:12). Rather, it was probably used as a designation to indicate the respect that was to be paid toward the office. Accordingly, Vedder explains that the term elder

. . . is of Hebrew origin, and refers to the honor paid this officer, as in the Jewish synagogue, and honor that was doubtless originally due to the selection of the older and wiser members for the office.³⁵

In like fashion, Dr. W. A. Criswell has stated:

The term ‘elder’ (*presbuteros*) is actually the name for an older person. The patriarchs of the Old Covenant were greatly honored. The word ‘elder’ describes the man who headed the family. There should be dignity for the pastor and reverence of the people for him.³⁶

The elders were to have general oversight of the church, as directed by both Paul and Peter (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-3). Lightfoot says their duties were basically divided into two major categories, that of ruling and teaching. He derives this from the phrase “pastors and teachers” in Ephesians 4:11 where the two terms describe different aspects of the same office.³⁷ Some of the specific tasks included in this general oversight were to be ruling (1 Timothy 5:17; cf. Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13), guarding and teaching the truth (Acts 15:2, 4, 6; Titus 1:9, 13), supervising the finances of

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Vedder, 30.

³⁶ W. A. Criswell, *Great Doctrines of the Bible*, vol. 3, *Ecclesiology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1983), 100. Cited hereafter as Criswell, *Doctrines*.

³⁷ Lightfoot, 194.

the church (Acts 11:29-30), and praying for and anointing the sick (James 5:14).

The practical qualifications for those who were to serve as elders are shared in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. These men also had supernatural qualifications as well. That is, those who served as elders in the New Testament church had been called by God to preach. As God called them, He also enabled them through one of the office gifts as listed in Ephesian 4:11. This principle is evident throughout the early church in that the apostles (1 Peter 5:1; 2 John 1; 3 John 1), prophets (Acts 15:22 with 32), evangelists (2 Timothy 4:5), and pastors (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-3) were all elders. Thus, there is no clear indication that the office of elder was ever filled by laymen or deacons (see below). Further, due to the large size of the churches, and the fact that these churches met in houses, the New Testament generally speaks of elders in the plural. Thus, churches today may see the need for having multiple preachers or associate pastors on staff.³⁸

Are Deacons Elders?

In the past it became somewhat of a trend among Southern Baptists to reference deacons as elders. For instance, Gaines Dobbins commented,

Were the elders pastors or deacons? Evidently they may have been either. There is little evidence for the later distinction of the pastor as belonging to the clergy and the deacon as belonging to the laity. The pastor's priority is that of responsibility for the whole of the church and its administrative work. Deacons seem to have had less general and more specialized responsibilities.³⁹

³⁸ A fuller discussion concerning lay elders, elder rule, the spiritual gifting of elders, the plurality of elders, and related issues can be found in *Appendix B: Are Laymen to Serve As Elders?*

³⁹ Gaines S. Dobbins, *A Ministering Church* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1960), 23.

Though Dobbins shared no biblical evidence for this view, he nonetheless was an influential writer. Outside the SBC, George Ladd offers a similar view of the deacon (though he does not specifically refer to deacons as elders). He groups deacons with elders based on the participle, *proistamenoι* (translated, “over you”), being used in relation to both pastors (1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 3:4) and deacons (1 Timothy 3:12). Thus, he says, “there is reason to conclude that *proistamenoι* designates the office of elder-bishop and deacon.”⁴⁰ However, Ladd’s perspective carries little weight in that the deacons are merely to oversee their home; their overseeing has nothing to do with the church as does the overseeing of the pastors.

Further, it should be noted that while overseeing and pastoring are equated with the elder on several occasions, the deacon is never equated with the elder. As a matter of fact, elders or bishops are often set in contradistinction to the deacons (Acts 6:1-6; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1, 8). Therefore, it seems best to agree with Carpenter when he says, “It is most unlikely that the *diakonoi* were included in the elders, since both their name and their later history indicate that they were subordinate ministers.”⁴¹

In Baptist life, however, the greatest confusion over the office of elder and deacon has not been the *designation* of deacons as elders; it has been the illegitimate belief that deacons are to *function* as elders. For instance, the writer recently spoke to a pastor who suggested that the answer to working with deacons “is to start treating them as elders; we ought to have them giving direction to the church.” Because of this common confusion

⁴⁰ Ladd, 352-53.

⁴¹ Carpenter, 150.

among Southern Baptists, Dr. William Bell, Jr. has coined the phrase "El-Deacs."⁴² He contends that this designation more accurately describes those who are being set apart in Baptist churches as deacons--they are set aside as deacons but are expected to function as elders. Thus, deacons are trying to oversee the church but do not meet the practical or spiritual qualifications of an elder or overseer.

This phenomenon can also be illustrated by the story of Pastor G.'s call to the ministry:

Mr. G. was a natural born leader. While in high school he held many leadership positions; he served as class president one year. His leadership skills, however, didn't stop with high school.

After graduating, Mr. G. became successful in the insurance business. Having grown up as a Southern Baptist, he also accepted leadership positions in the church. However, something new happened--the Lord called Mr. G. to preach. Surprisingly, however, this call was quite disturbing to him. He didn't want to be rebellious, but he did have considerable reservations--Mr. G. wanted to be a *leader*!

In his desperate attempt to serve and please God but also be honest with himself, G. finally came to a resolve. He would become a deacon--not only a deacon, but the Chairman of Deacons. He thought this had to be the answer to God's call; this was truly a position where he could get things done. And that's what Mr. G. did; he became Chairman of Deacons.

However, the call of God endured. After a time of inner struggle, Mr. G. became Pastor G. He decided he must do what God had set him apart to do. Now G. is a successful and blessed pastor. He is even a *leader*.⁴³

This true life story is probably only a small indication of the informal "training" many are receiving as they attend church. It is "training" because members usually learn more by what is being done than by what is said--practice, not preaching, is what really "teaches"

⁴² Dr. William Bell, Jr, Dean of the Mary C. Crowley College of Christian Faith at Dallas Baptist University, interview by the author, 2 August 1995, at Dallas Baptist University, Dallas, Texas, tape recorded.

⁴³ A personal interview by the author, 22 February 1995.

people. Thus, Pastor G.'s tradition kept him from being willing to accept God's call--an unwillingness not stemming from rebellion, but from confusion. His story, no doubt, has been duplicated in thousands of churches where tradition has subtly replaced the Scriptures as the base of authority.

The Elder Should be Respected and Followed

As the word elder has been considered, it is evidently a term that demands respect for those to whom it fittingly applies. Thus, the church and the deacon should respect this office and protect its integrity as a God given position. As. W. A. Criswell has stated:

The word elder primarily and essentially describes the dignity of the office of pastor (1 Tim. 5:17-19). It is a cheap, sorry church that looks upon its pastor as a hireling, as a paid errand-runner of the deacons, as an object of charity. It is a great, strong, mighty church (however small the numerical membership) that looks upon the pastor as an ambassador from the courts of heaven, as God's man for their people . . . God will bless any church that loves and respects its pastor.⁴⁴

The Meaning of Bishop (or Overseer)

A Basic Definition of Bishop

The term *episkopos* is generally translated "bishop" or "overseer." "Overseer" is the literal rendering of the component parts of the Greek word:

The original word is made up of two Greek words: a preposition *epi*, meaning 'over'; and a noun *skopos* meaning 'a watcher' (from the verb *skeptomai*, meaning 'to look around,' 'to survey'). Literally, therefore the word *episkopos* ('bishop') means an overseer.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Criswell, *Guidebook*, 216.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 215-16.

When used in its technical sense, the word indicates “persons who have a definite function or a fixed office within a group,” thus carrying the meaning of a “superintendent, guardian, [or] bishop.”⁴⁶ A person thus designated is “an overseer, a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly, any curator, guardian, or superintendent.”⁴⁷

Episkopos is of Greek origin.⁴⁸ In Athenian culture it designated a civil officer sent “as an inspector or overseer of a subject state.”⁴⁹ It could also indicate an officer in pagan religions, as found in the temple of Apollo at Rhodes.⁵⁰ In the LXX, the Greek version of the Old Testament, it commonly signified “inspectors, superintendents, taskmasters, as 2 Kings 11:19; 2 Chronicles 34:12, 17; Isaiah 60:17; and in others it is a higher title ‘captains’ or ‘presidents,’ Nehemiah 11:9, 14, 22.”⁵¹ Accordingly, Lightfoot conjectures

⁴⁶ BAGD, 299.

⁴⁷ Thayer, 243.

⁴⁸ Though *episkopos* is generally recognized as being of non-Jewish origin, Hinson (E. Glenn Hinson, “Commentary on 1 Timothy,” in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Clifton J. Allen, 12 vols. [Nashville: Broadman Press, 1971], 11:317) nevertheless makes the following connection: “The similarity of the functional title *episcopos* to the Essene overseer or superintendent (*mebaqqer*) has led J. N. D. Kelly to theorize that ‘the term, and the administrative system it represented, passed into the Church from heterodox Judaism.’ The overseer’s duties included examination of new members, direction of finance, teaching, disciplining, arbitration of disputes among members, conduct of public meetings, and rendering a general pastoral ministry.”

⁴⁹ *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon*, abrdg. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 260. Cited hereafter as *L&S*.

⁵⁰ BAGD, 299.

⁵¹ Lightfoot, 95-96.

that the principle idea of the word is “inspection.”⁵² In Latin, its equivalent is “supervisor.”⁵³

In the New Testament, the word is applied to Christ as a “guardian of the souls” (1 Peter 2:25).⁵⁴ It is used in Acts 1:20 of the apostles when reference is made to Judas’ “office.” It is also applied to the pastor who is both designated as an overseer (Acts 20:28; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1, 2; Titus 1:7) and commanded to perform the function of overseeing (1 Peter 5:2). In several older versions of the Bible, a subscript to the book of Ephesians states that Timothy was the “bishop” of Ephesus; a subscript to the book of Titus indicates that Titus was the “bishop” of the Cretans.⁵⁵ In summary, then, Thayer says it means “the superintendent, head, or overseer of any Christian church.”⁵⁶ Cowen notes that “spiritually he is a guardian of the soul (1 Peter 2:25).”⁵⁷

Other words are also used in the New Testament indicating that the pastor is to perform the function of overseeing. For instance, elders are designated in 1 Timothy 5:17 as those who “rule” in the church. The word translated “rule” is *proistemi* and is used again in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 to designate those who are “over you in the Lord.”

⁵² Ibid, 96.

⁵³ Herschel H. Hobbs, *A Layman's Handbook of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1974), 56.

⁵⁴ BAGD, 299.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Thayer, 243.

⁵⁷ Cowen, 57.

Proistemi means to “be at the head (of), rule, direct . . . manage, [or] conduct” and is used of “officials and administrators in the church.”⁵⁸

Similarly, the function of overseeing is indicated in Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24 by the word *hegeomai* (translated, “rule”), which means to “lead” or “guide.”⁵⁹ In secular use it designated various “high officials,” including “military commanders” and leaders of pagan “religious bodies.”⁶⁰ In this passage it indicates the “heads of a Christian church.”⁶¹ It is used elsewhere in the New Testament of Jesus as Ruler of Israel (Matthew 2:6), of Moses as “governor over Egypt” (Acts 7:10), and of the apostles, prophets, and elders at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:22, 32).

A main function of the pastor then is to oversee the church. Thus, in the words of Dr. W. A. Criswell, the pastor

. . . is the officer in the church that oversees all the work of the Lord. The title [*episkopos*] refers to his assignment. He is responsible for the life and well-being of the congregation. The entire work heads up in him. He is the leader of the church.⁶²

Are Deacons Overseers?

When one survey respondent was asked whether the word “deacon” meant “overseer,” administrator,” or “servant,” she responded by saying, “All, because a deacon

⁵⁸ BAGD, 707.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 343.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Criswell, *Guidebook*, 215-16.

is a servant to the Lord and is also an administrator and overseer to the church body.”

This answer seems to be typical of the general misunderstanding concerning the deacon that is so prevalent in the church today. But, this answer falls short for at least two reasons. First of all, the deacon cannot serve the Lord without serving his pastor and church. Secondly, deacons are never referred to in Scripture as administrators or overseers; in fact, they are kept absolutely distinct from the overseers (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1, 8). The only remark that could perhaps be remotely taken to mean that deacons were to be overseers is found in Acts 6:3b. Here the first deacons are appointed by the apostles to be “over” (*epi*) the “business” (*chreias*) of caring for the widows. However, in this instance, the word *epi*, not *episkopos*, is used and merely means to “set someone over, put someone in charge, of someth[ing] or someone.”⁶³ *Chreias* has the basic meaning of need, charity, lack, want, or relief and is used in Acts 6:3 to indicate an “office,” “duty,” or “service.”⁶⁴ Accordingly, the deacons were appointed to the “office” or “duty” of “needs.” They were given the responsibility of rendering ministry (*diakonia*) to the widows, not serving as overseers (*episkopoi*) or rulers (*proistemi, hegeomai*) of the church, the apostles, or the finances. Further, they were to be responsible to the apostles as the overseers of all the church’s ministries, including the benevolent ministries.

Overseers Are to be Respected and Followed

The function of overseeing in the American church has not been popular with

⁶³ BAGD, 286.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 884-85.

many individuals. For instance, one WMU leader who responded to the survey exclaimed,

I do not like the term *overseer*. It implies an authority figure rather than a team leader . . . [The pastor] is only a spiritual leader. If I wanted an authority figure I would belong to a church with a hierarchy such as Methodist, Catholic, Presbyterian, etc.

The primary problem with this lady's response is that it defies Scripture--and God Himself. No individual has the right to deny the biblical function of overseeing in the church simply because he does not want it. Some individuals do not want accountability or authority in the area of home, work, government, or church. Further, church polity and doctrine are not developed by making comparisons with other denominations but by looking to the New Testament.

It is true that those who serve as overseers in the church are to render such service with a humble spirit. For instance, the disciples were reminded by Jesus that those who would "govern" (*hegeomai*) within His kingdom's work were to be servants not lords (Luke 22:26). Likewise, Peter told the elders who were to serve as "overseers" (*episkopew*) to do so by example and not as lords (1 Peter 5:3). However, submission to biblical pastoral authority is commanded by God. In the church, the pastor has been called to oversee; this requires the flock to submit and obey (Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24). This issue has been treated in a balanced and godly way by pastor and author, Chuck Swindoll:

Ours is a talk-back, fight-back, get-even society that is ready to resist--and sue--at the slightest provocation. Instead of the obedient Minute Man representing our national image, a new statue with a curled upper lip, an open mouth screaming obscenities, and both fists in the air could better describe our times. Defiance, resistance, violence, and retaliation are now our "style."

. . . I fully realize there are times when resistance is needed. We would not be a free nation had we not fought for our liberty. Furthermore, the

lawless would rule over the righteous if we allowed ourselves to be walked on, stolen from, and otherwise taken advantage of. There are times when there must be resistance and a strong determination to defend one's rights . . . My concern is the obvious erosion of respect for needed and fair authority . . . the lack of submission toward those who should be over us, who earn and deserve our cooperation. Instead, there is a growing independence, a stubborn defiance against any authority that attempts to criticize, correct, or even caution. No one can deny that this self-centered rebellion is on the rise. My desire is that we see the difference, then respond correctly to God-given authority with an attitude of true humility, the mentality mentioned in the New Testament modeled so beautifully by Jesus Christ

“Be humble under God’s powerful hand so he will lift you up when the right time comes. Give all your worries to him, because he cares about you” (1 Peter 5:6-7 NCV).⁶⁵

Thus, of all people, Christians should set the example for others in learning to submit to God-given authority figures. Accordingly, the words of pastor Jack Hayford concerning submission are fitting at this point. He says,

The Word of God has a great deal to say about a disciple’s learning “submission,” but it never suggests that to do so is to resign human dignity, intelligence, or good sense.

Submission has to do with our sensible acceptance of our appropriate place in God’s order of things. It has everything to do with clear-headed thinking and nothing to do with empty-hearted self-centeredness⁶⁶

His [Jesus] example calls you and me to discover the power release and growth that will only happen in and through us if we properly learn the spirit of submission. The path *down*--submitting--is the way *up*--receiving authority, and even then, all authority in the spiritual realm is only to be exercised in the spirit and with the attitudes of a servant.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Charles R. Swindoll, “Authority,” in *The Answer*, the Holy Bible: Translated for Our Time With Selected Writings by Leading Inspirational Authors, containing the New Century Version (Dallas: Word Pub., 1993), 481.

⁶⁶ Jack W. Hayford, *The Power & Blessing: Celebrating the Disciplines of Spirit-filled Living* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, a division of SP Pub., 1994), 33-34.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 135.

The Meaning of Pastor (or Shepherd)

A Basic Definition of Pastor

The word “pastor” (*poimen*) primarily indicates a “herdsman” or “shepherd” and is used figuratively to mean “a shepherd of the people, i.e. a prince, chief.”⁶⁸ The verb, *poimaino*, means to “herd, tend, (lead to) pasture”⁶⁹ and thus to “keep flocks, be a shepherd.”⁷⁰ Metaphorically, it is used to mean “tend, . . . cherish, . . . guide, lead . . .”⁷¹ and speaks “of activity that protects, rules, governs, fosters.”⁷² In extrabiblical literature, the derivative, *poimanorion*, was used literally to speak of a “herd,” but symbolically of “an army under its leader.”⁷³ The concept of shepherding was common to the largely agrarian people of Biblical times, making it an apt metaphor for a caring relationship between two persons. Thus, shepherding is used in both the Old and New Testaments to describe the relationship that God and His appointed leaders have with His people.

In the Old Testament, this was an especially significant religious metaphor for the Jewish people--Yahweh had chosen it to describe His relationship to them as the covenant people. He is pictured as their Shepherd (Psalm 78:52-53; 79:13; 80:1; 100:3). Being

⁶⁸ *L&S*, 569.

⁶⁹ *BAGD*, 683.

⁷⁰ *L&S*, 569.

⁷¹ *Ibid*.

⁷² *BAGD*, 683.

⁷³ *L&S*, 569.

their Shepherd meant that He would love them (Isaiah 40:11), lead them (Psalm 95:6-7), provide for them (Psalm 23:1-4), require their obedience (Psalm 74:1; Hosea 4:16), forgive their sins (Micah 7:14, 18-19), and ultimately bless them (Ezekiel 34:22-31). Likewise, the metaphor is used in several prophecies concerning Christ who would come as the One True Shepherd (Ezekiel 34:22-24; 37:24-25; Micah 5:2-4 with Matthew 2:6).

In the New Testament, this motif is used primarily of Christ. He is seen teaching and caring for the weary people who had no shepherd (Mark 6:34). Thus, He is the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-30), the Great Shepherd (Hebrews 13:20), the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:14), and the Bishop and Shepherd of the believer's soul (1 Peter 2:25). The verb (*poimaino*) is used of the activity of Christ five times (Matthew 2:6; Revelation 2:27; 7:17; 12:5; 19:15), being translated "shepherd" two times and "rule" three times.

Finally, the idea of shepherding is indirectly applied to the Holy Spirit as evidenced by His pastoral ministries; He births new lambs (John 3:3-7; Titus 3:4-5), teaches them spiritual truths (John 16:12-15; 1 Corinthians 2:13), and is their Helper ("Comforter," KJV; John 14:16-18). "Helper" (*parakletos*) means "one called alongside to help . . . as one who gives protection, help, and security . . . helper, comforter, counsellor."⁷⁴ This word may also have been used in history to denote the activity of one who would prod cattle to encourage them along the way. Thus, He is never directly designated as a

⁷⁴ *ANLEX*, s. v. "παράκλητος." Thayer (483) says the word means, "in the widest sense, a helper, succourer, aider, assistant [as used] of the Holy Spirit destined to take the place of Christ with the apostles (after his ascension to the Father), to lead them to a deeper knowledge of the gospel truth, and give them divine strength needed to enable them to undergo trials and persecutions on behalf of the divine kingdom."

poimen, but His activity of shepherding is obvious.

Apart from God, Scripture uses this metaphorical terminology in only one other way--to designate those human leaders selected by God to guide His people. In the Old Testament it is used of several specific leaders. For instance, Psalm 77:20 says, "*You led Your people like a flock By the hand of Moses and Aaron.*" Again, in Isaiah 63:11-12, Moses is seen as the shepherd of Israel:

*Then he remembered the days of old, Moses and his people, saying:
"Where is He who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of His flock? . . ." {12} Who led them by the right hand of Moses, with His glorious arm, dividing the water before them to make for Himself an everlasting name . . ."*

It is also stated in Scripture that God later chose David to be His shepherd over Israel:

Also, in time past, even when Saul was king, you were the one who led Israel out and brought them in; and the LORD your God said to you, "You shall shepherd My people Israel, and be ruler over My people Israel." 1 Chronicles 11:2

and . . .

He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; From following the ewes that had young He brought him, to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands. Psalm 78:70-72

The same terminology is used of Joshua in Numbers 27:15-18 and of the judges in 1 Chronicles 17:6.

In the New Testament, Jesus was the first to apply this metaphor to God-appointed leadership when He commissioned Peter to feed His sheep (John 21:16).⁷⁵

⁷⁵ A. T. Robertson, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 vols. ([Nashville]: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist

Likewise, Jesus' words were no doubt in Peter's mind when he in turn admonished the elders to "shepherd" the flock of God (1 Peter 5:2). In the latter instance, Peter was comparing the shepherding act of the elders (5:2) to that of the Chief Shepherd (5:4), who was the Shepherd of their souls (2:25). It is within this context, then, that one can easily grasp the idea of the pastor being God's "undershepherd." Hence, it is the God-called pastor(s), not the saints in general, who are responsible for leading, governing, guiding, and directing the flock of God; the shepherding metaphor is never extended to the whole church body (Acts 20:17, 28). Thus, "shepherding" is used to describe the function of the primary leader in the Christian church.

When used within a Christian context then, *poimen* indicates "one who assumes leadership over a group of believers."⁷⁶ Thus, the pastor "is also called a 'shepherd' (*poimen*), one who cares for the souls of the people."⁷⁷ In the Church, *poimaino* means to "lead," "guide," and "rule."⁷⁸ Thus, it indicates the responsibility and authority to provide both the "direction" (John 21:16; 1 Peter 5:2) and "administration" (Acts 20:28) of a "congregation."⁷⁹

Though Baptists often use "pastor" as their primary term of reference for the preacher, it should be noted that this word is used only once, in Ephesians 4:11, as a

Convention, 1930; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, n. d.), 353.

⁷⁶ *ANLEX*, s. v. "ποιμήν."

⁷⁷ Criswell, *Doctrines*, 100-101.

⁷⁸ *BAGD*, 683.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

biblical designation for the preacher. Thus, the noun “pastor” is actually used less in Scripture than either elder or overseer. This Baptist practice was adopted from the Reformation writers (particularly Calvin) who wanted to de-emphasize the use of overseer because of the abuse that had been associated with the corrupt clergy of their day. Thus, while Baptists practice good New Testament theology by referring to their preacher as “pastor,” they should be careful not to exclude the other more prominent biblical designations of elder and overseer.

Pastors Are to be Respected and Followed

The Rejection of Pastoral Authority

Though God gave human shepherds in both the Old and New Testaments, they were not always understood. This misunderstanding was evident in Moses’ life when he served as God’s shepherd (Numbers 12-13, 14-16). The people decided that Moses was not what they wanted, so they proclaimed, “*Let us select a leader and return to Egypt*” (emphasis added; Numbers 14:4).

This type of defiance was also common during other rebellious periods of Israel’s history. One of their darkest periods was just prior to the Babylonian captivity. During this era God had Hosea proclaim, “. . . *they consume their rulers; All their kings have fallen. None of them calls on Me*” (Hosea 7:7, NASB). He then goes on to write for the Lord, “*They set up kings, but not by Me; They made princes, but I did not acknowledge them*” (8:4). Thus, in the midst of their rebellion, they consumed their rulers and did not call upon God because they wanted to choose their own leadership. Likewise, Solomon

recognized this same spiritual truth in his Proverbs. He stated that, “*Because of the transgression of a land, many are its princes*” (Proverbs 28:2). Here, the idea of having many rulers “indicates that during rebellious times a nation has many changes of power or many people vying for power.”⁸⁰ This was certainly true in Israel’s history. Derek Kidner has noted, “In just over two centuries Israel, because of its sins, had nine dynasties, each, after the first, inaugurated by an assassination.”⁸¹ Thus, there was an “instability due to sin.”⁸² Similarly, when a church is rebellious there will be a high turnover in pastoral leadership.

This same phenomenon still occurs today when people fail to understand the blessing that will come from being submissive to the authority structures God places in their lives. The first thought of many disgruntled church members who get mad at the pastor is to find a new pastor. Somehow they are convinced that they are in charge of appointing shepherds, rather than God. However, Scripture states that it is the Holy Spirit who makes such decisions: “*Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood*” (emphasis added; Acts 20:28). Therefore, it is the saints job to pray, seek the face of God, and humbly discern which shepherd God is placing in their midst--it is not their position to select themselves a new leader each time

⁸⁰ Allen P. Ross, “Proverbs,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1991), 5:1102.

⁸¹ Derek Kidner, *The Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary in The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1964), 168.

⁸² Ibid.

they become disgruntled.

The Pastor Serving As A Hired Hand

A church that habitually dismisses its pastors is assuming an ungodly practice; they are treating the man of God as a hireling. As John Feinberg has shrewdly observed,

Sad to say, many churches view their pastor as a hireling, to be hired and fired at the will and whim of the people. A shepherd has a special position with special honor and authority, and in turn he has a special love for his sheep. A hireling has little authority. He is there to do someone else's bidding . . . Scripture indicates that the pastor is Christ's undershepherd, not the church's hired hand.⁸³

However, the New Testament never gives the example of a church "hiring" a pastor-- pastors are always God-called and God-appointed. As a matter of fact, Jesus Himself speaks out strongly against the idea of having a hireling over God's flock. For instance, He says,

But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. {13} The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. John 10:12-13

Thus, if a pastor is a true, God-called shepherd, following in the steps of The Good Shepherd, he will tell the truth, guard the sheep, and do as God has directed him; he will not compromise God's truth because of carnal people.

Nevertheless, strong leadership will provoke rebellion in many, even if this leadership is provided by a godly person with godly attitudes. As mentioned above, Moses constantly experienced the turmoil of shepherding a carnal and rebellious people,

⁸³ John Feinberg, "An Undershepherd or a Hireling?," *Fundamentalist Journal* 2 (October 1983): 16.

yet he was both honest (Numbers 16:15) and the most humble man on the earth (Numbers 12:3). David was a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22) but often was opposed by those who wanted to usurp his position and authority (1 Samuel 18:29; 2 Samuel 15:1ff; 20:1ff; 1 Kings 1:5). Even Timothy, a timid young man, was opposed by some in the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 16:10).

Pastoral Leadership and Church Growth

Although many do not appreciate strong leadership from their pastor, it is a well known fact that only the churches which allow their pastor the freedom to lead will grow. For instance, Peter Wagner, a church growth strategist, highlighted the importance of this truth in his book *Leading Your Church to Growth*. He states:

The principle argument of this book is that if churches are going to maximize their growth potential they need pastors who are strong leaders. The point requires thorough explanation because it is not commonly expressed. There may be exceptions, as there are to any church growth principle, but make no mistake about it: it is a rule. If your church is not growing and you wonder why, take a close look at the roles of the pastor. In some cases you won't have to look much further to discover your major barrier to growth.⁸⁴

Wagner then offers an explanation as to why this principle has been ignored:

One reason why strong pastoral leadership is not characteristic of many of America's churches is that in the recent past clergy have been taught just the opposite in the seminaries. Many pastors learned from their seminary professors that they should not abuse their leadership positions in the churches. They were taught to reject strong, authoritative, directive pastoral leadership. A whole vocabulary has been developed to discredit pastors who have tended toward aggressive leadership. It is called

⁸⁴ C. Peter Wagner, *Leading Your Church to Growth* (Ventura, CA.: Regal Books, a division of GL Publications, 1984), 73.

“dictatorial,” conjuring up images of Hitler or Idi Amin. It is said to be “Jim Jones” type of leadership, so obnoxious to sensitive Christians. Some put it this way: “Christianity needs no ayatollahs!” Pastors are warned against “ego trips” and “empire building.”⁸⁵

One popular leadership model currently used to discredit strong pastoral leadership is egalitarianism or “servanthood” leadership. Though all leaders are required to be servants, this model merely suggests that everyone is a servant, and no one is the leader. Some who propagate this theory deny all authority structures, thus advocating a model that has more in common with the feminist and flower-power movements of the 1960’s than with the New Testament. The fallacy of this model is that it fails to distinguish between the structure necessary for leadership and the spirit in which leadership is to be carried out. That is, there must be a structure--for leadership to occur, someone has to be designated as leader. The servanthood aspect of leadership then has to do with the spirit and attitude in which this leadership is carried out. To deny any authority structure and merely speak of “servanthood” is to obliterate leadership itself. Without the structure, there is no leadership; without the servanthood attitude, there is an abuse of that leadership. The point is this--a leader in authority must serve with a servant’s heart, and a servant must respect authority and be willing to submit to the direction of the leadership. Jesus recognized both servanthood (Mark 10:45) and authority (Mark 14:36). Thus, as Hans Finzel has written, “I believe in strong leadership, but I also believe in the concept of servant leadership. The two are not mutually exclusive.”⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Ibid., 73-74.

⁸⁶ Hans Finzel, *Help! I'm A Baby Boomer* (Wheaton: Victor Books, a division of Scripture Press Publications, Inc., 1989), 144.

The Meaning of Submission

Finally, it is important to note that being submissive to godly authority figures is not demeaning or cruel or degrading--rather, it is wholesome and necessary. When the Bible speaks of submission, Hayford says it carries the following meaning and importance:

The meaning of the word is unquestionably related to military structures. *Hypotasso* (Greek, to submit) was literally, culturally, used to refer to an arrangement of troops *under* proper order; each private, corporal, sergeant, lieutenant, captain, etc., relating correctly right up the line through majors, colonels, and generals--to a commander-in-chief.

In such military regimentation the existence of the structure is not designed to reduce the significance of anyone or inflate the importance of another. It is designed to *assist* the effectiveness of all, to *assure* the interests of all, and to *assemble* the whole of the body to resist and overthrow the enemy.

The Bible is very clear: there *is* a God-ordained order for every facet of our lives. None of us are simply "standalones" . . . And even in the realm of our spiritual relationships--to church, to Christians, to ministries--it is very easy to subtly arrogate to oneself a broad individualism on the supposition that "I'm a free creature under God and I'll do just what I want or see 'best.'" We can be "ever so nice a guy," keeping the laws of society, even obeying the boss at work. But get me in church? Hey, we're *all* "in charge" here!⁸⁷

For the church to be effective in her mission against the gates of hell, she must be ordered and ready according to God's standards and design--anything less will spell disaster when standing against Satan and his highly organized entourage (Ephesians 6:11-12).

Hayford goes on to address the misconception so common to modern America that following is always demeaning. He says,

While society interprets "submission" to mean "subjugation," or to "dominate," it doesn't mean that at all. Subjugation and domination are what happens when one person or kingdom overrules another: they're intimidated, plundered, mastered, then broken.

⁸⁷ Hayford, 134-35.

But “submission” has nothing to do with that, for there really isn’t any such thing as forced submission. True submission can never be forced because, foremost, submission is always an inner attitude--a heart issue. It can never be required: it can only be volunteered--given as a willing gift. Only I can choose whether or not I will submit.

Under Christ, we must learn the spirit of submission as it relates to others--others we serve with, others we serve under, others we don’t want to serve at all. But willingness, humility, and servanthood must be kept in view. I may say I’ll “submit,” but if my heart rankles and internally resents or resists, I am not accepting or participating in the spirit of submission. And not only will I fail to garner the power God intends me to know through becoming a submitted person, I’ll miss the blessing . . .⁸⁸

The Theology of the Billy Goat

When there is a lack of submission in the church, the blessings of God will be missed. The foolishness and fighting that result from this type of selfishness has more in common with the animal kingdom than with God’s kingdom. It is similar, for instance, to the attitudes of Billy Goat Gruff who always hid under his bridge and attempted to intimidate everyone who came down his road. This may be the typical attitude of anyone who tries to “run” things, especially if he has not been designated in Scripture as leader (3 John 9-10). The odd thing is that often the fighting occurs over matters that are insignificant.

To continue the analogy of the goat’s theology, another illustration related by the writer’s father-in-law may prove helpful. He recalled growing up on a farm in Maryland where the family owned numerous farm animals, including goats. One of the farm amusements was watching these goats in their daily routines. A favorite activity of the billy goats was to try to claim the position of “king of the mountain.” Each of them would

⁸⁸ Ibid., 136.

run up the manure pile, knock another goat off, and then stand boldly on top of the pile-- only to be knocked off himself after a few minutes. While this courageous battling may have boosted the billy goat's ego, what did he really have once he claimed his victory? Well, nothing but a pile of manure. It may be surprising to know how much of this barnyard theology is practiced in the church. It might be helpful to remember that God's children are sheep, not goats.

The Meaning of Deacon

The Meaning of the Root Word Diakonew

There are three words used in Scripture (*diakonos, diakonia, diakonein*) that relate to the office of deacon.⁸⁹ Each of these forms are derivatives of the root *diakonew*, which in the classical sense meant "to wait at table."⁹⁰ This basic meaning is "echoed" in all forms of the word.⁹¹ More generally it meant "provide or care for" and has the inclusive meaning "to serve."⁹² In Judaism it had similar uses. Philo used it to speak of

⁸⁹ C. E. B. Cranfield, "Diakonia in the New Testament," *Service in Christ: Essays Presented to Karl Barth on His 80th Birthday*, ed. James I. McCord and T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1966), 37. Cranfield further states, "In pagan Greek the verb *diakonein* is used both in a narrow sense, with reference to waiting at table or attending to someone's bodily needs, and also in a broad sense, of service rendered to another person quite generally, while the cognates *diakonia* and *diakonos* are used to denote, respectively, the action of *diakonein* and the person who performs it."

⁹⁰ Hermann W. Beyer, "διακονέω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, trans. and ed. by G. W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1964-76), 2 (1964): 82. Cited hereafter as Beyer, *TDNT*.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

service in the same sense of waiting on tables.⁹³ Josephus used it to mean waiting on tables, serving, and obeying.⁹⁴

The secular application of *diakonew* in Greek life was seen in both its use to describe the work of one who cared “for household needs” (thus indicating personal subjection) and to designate one’s acts of service to the community or state (thus indicating a service performed by a free man).⁹⁵ The Greek culture considered service to the state to be honorable but understood personal service to another as being derogatory. Hess states,

In general the voluntary giving of oneself in the service of one’s fellow man is alien to Gk. thought. The highest goal before man was the development of his own personality.⁹⁶

However, as Jesus walked among those with this mind set, He became a living contradiction to their self-centeredness. In the New Testament then, the idea of service to others became the key to understanding Christ and following Him (Mark 10:35-45). As Beyer states,

The natural man--especially the Greek--would see no difficulty in answering the question who is greater, the one who serves or the one who is served. It is obviously the latter . . . [However, Jesus emphatically states]: I am among you as a servant. This is said by the uncontested leader of the disciples, by the Son of Man who knows that He is Lord of

⁹³ Ibid., 83.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Klaus Hess, “Serve, Deacon, Worship,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, gen. ed. Colin Brown, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Corp., 1975-1978), 3 [1978]: 545. Cited hereafter as *NIDNTT*.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

the kingdom of God (Lk. 22:29) . . . [Thus,]He is instituting in fact a new pattern of human relationships. He makes this no less clear in terms of the specific process of waiting at table than by His own action in washing the feet of His disciples.⁹⁷

Thus, Jesus is a self-described servant who actually did the work that His Father sent Him to do, indicating that service is not to be seen in a negative light (Matthew 20:28; Romans 15:8). An application for the deacon (or any Christian) can be specifically made at this point. C. E. B. Cranfield states,

When those who give of their substance for the relief of the needy or those who organize and administer the Church's *diakonia* yield to the temptation to self-importance and lordliness, their service ceases to be authentic *diakonia*.⁹⁸

The Meaning and Use of Diakonein

In the same word group the verbal form, "to serve" (*diakonein*), as used in Acts 6:2 (" . . . *It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables*"), means to "serve as deacons" as ones who "take care of the poor and the sick"⁹⁹ It is used in the Pastoral Epistles in 1 Timothy 3:10, 13 with the meaning "to discharge the office of a deacon."¹⁰⁰ *Diakonein* is a derivative of *diakonew*, which generally means to "serve," with the idea of "services of any kind" (Matthew 4:11).¹⁰¹ It means "supplying with life's

⁹⁷ Beyer, 84.

⁹⁸ Cranfield, 41.

⁹⁹ Thayer, 137.

¹⁰⁰ Beyer, 87.

¹⁰¹ *ANLEX*, s. v. "διακονέω."

necessaries” and thus, to “support, take care of, minister to” (Matthew 25:44).¹⁰² Likewise, it means to “wait on” or “serve,” with the idea of “table service” (Luke 12:37).¹⁰³ Thus, when speaking of Christian service, its technical sense means to “serve as a deacon” and “perform the duties of a deacon” (1 Timothy 3:10) as it relates to the “physical needs of believers.”¹⁰⁴

Specific New Testament examples include the angels’ ministry to Jesus after the temptation (Mark 1:13; Matthew 4:11), Martha’s preparation of food (Luke 10:40), and the supper prepared by Peter’s mother-in-law (Mark 1:31). In Matthew 25:42-44, Jesus uses it to speak of ministry in the areas of food, clothing, etc. A good example for the deacon to consider is that ministry spoken of in Acts 6:2, for which they are to be responsible. Beyer states,

In a rather wider sense διακονεῖν means “to supervise the meal” in Ac. 6:2: διακονεῖν τραπέζαισ. The reference is not merely to the provision of food but to the daily preparation and organisation. H. J. Holtzmann describes the men to whom this task was committed as organisers, dispensers and overseers of meals, τραπέζοποιοί.¹⁰⁵

This ministry is further described by Hess:

Every Friday those who lived in the locality received enough money from the poor basket (*quppah*) for fourteen meals; strangers received food every day from the poor bowl (*tamhuy*). This food had been collected earlier from house to house by the officers of the poor . . . In addition there were common meals and alms. In the diaspora, synagogues often set up a

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Beyer, 84.

committee of seven for its service. The title *parnasim*, from *parnes*, feed, points to service at table and in general.¹⁰⁶

The Meaning and Use of Diakonia

Another word in the same group, “service” (*diakonia*), is used to denote “the activity of *diakonein*”¹⁰⁷ and thus speaks of the service rendered by a *diakonos*. *Diakonia* basically means “waiting at table” or “for any ‘discharge of service’ in genuine love.”¹⁰⁸ Thayer, Liddell and Scott, *NIDNTT*, and *BAGD* also show that it pertains to the “office” of deacon when used in its technical sense.¹⁰⁹ The following are several specific instances where the word is used in its general sense to denote ministry: (1) Stephanas giving his house for the “ministry” of the saints (1 Corinthians 16:15); (2) Paul reminding Christians to witness and thus fulfill the “ministry” of reconciliation that had been entrusted to them (2 Corinthians 5:18f); (3) Paul reminding Timothy to fulfill the obligations of his “ministry” as a preacher and evangelist (2 Timothy 4:5); and (4) Paul requesting that Mark come to help him in his missionary “ministry” that was being conducted from jail (2 Timothy 4:11).

The Meaning and Use of Diakonos

The word “deacon” (*diakonos*), is a derived noun used to specifically denote the

¹⁰⁶ Hess, 545.

¹⁰⁷ Beyer, 87.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Thayer, 138; *L&S*, 162; Hess, 544; and *BAGD*, 184.

office of a deacon in 1 Timothy 3:8 and Philippians 1:1.¹¹⁰ In the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Old Testament), the word is used seven times, five times denoting “court servants,” one time denoting “torturers,” and once in Proverbs 10:4.¹¹¹ *Diakonos* means “servant.”¹¹² In the New Testament, it can relate to those who serve in civil positions (Romans 13:1-4). Concerning Christian service it identifies the apostle Paul and Apollos as servants of God and the church (1 Corinthians 3:5), Epaphras as a faithful minister to the Colossians (Colossians 1:7), and all believers as servants of Christ (John 12:26). In the technical sense it came to be used as the designation of an office in the Christian church. The deacon was to also serve his church by serving his pastor. Beyer says, “The *diakonos* is not merely the servant of the church, but also of the bishop.”¹¹³ Thus the whole idea of servanthood is concentrated in an office--an office that the modern church calls “deacon.”

Conclusion

When New Testament terminology denoting the two officers of the church is understood correctly, it appears that at least one aspect of church structure is necessarily dictated. Though all are to be servants, the pastor has been given the responsibility and

¹¹⁰ Liddell and Scott (162) and Thayer (138), claim the origin of this derivative word is uncertain. Robertson (73) thinks it is derived from the two words *dia*, meaning “through,” and *konos*, meaning “dust,” with the resulting denotation being that of a tablewaiter who in his haste to serve stirs up the dust. However, Thayer (138) and Hess (545) deny this meaning.

¹¹¹ Hess, 545.

¹¹² *BAGD*, 184.

¹¹³ Beyer, 90.

authority for providing the primary leadership of the church.

The model of a restaurant may help serve to illustrate these truths. Jim Barcio, a friend of the writer's, is the manager of a local Christian restaurant *The Mustard Seed*. The author has noticed when patronizing the establishment that a certain structure is in place and being followed. The waiters and waitresses are serving the people. Without this service, people would remain hungry and the cafe would soon go out of business. It has also been noticed that Jim is responsible for setting schedules, hiring and firing employees, giving general direction to the establishment, and, on occasion, even waiting a table himself. In this context, the waiters and waitresses know their position and responsibilities and go about their duties. Though there may be occasional complaints or disagreements, generally there seems to be harmony and cooperation between the management and staff.

But what would it be like for no one to be in charge? What would it be like if all the employees attempted to oversee the direction of the restaurant? There would be chaos. Although this is a Christian establishment, with many employees being believers, no one seems to think it a necessarily wicked practice to allow Jim to manage the place. They probably even realize the sad state of affairs that would occur if he did not provide the basic oversight. What is true in the restaurant is also true in the church; there must be structure. The table waiters must wait tables, and the manager must give general oversight. Not a bad system--it works!

CHAPTER 3

A SURVEY OF ACTS 6:1-7

Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. {2} 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. {3} "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; {4} "but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." {5} And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, {6} whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. {7} 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. Acts 6:1-7

The Occasion of the First Deacon Ministry

A Growing Church

To fully understand the ministry of the deacon, it is helpful to note the occasion that called for the creation of the office. These circumstances are shared in Acts 6, which indicates the early church was experiencing tremendous growth. First, "disciples" is not speaking of the Twelve, but the whole church body.¹ The word "multiplying" is a present

¹ E. M. Blaiklock, *The Acts of the Apostles*, in *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, gen. ed. R. V. G Tasker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1959), 74.

particle meaning “fullness” or “increase,”² indicating that the church was in a perpetual state of growth. Thus, as all healthy and obedient churches, the church at Jerusalem was constantly seeing people saved as a result of their prayer and witnessing. The church was approximately five years old,³ but its growth was so dynamic that the congregation averaged almost twenty-five thousand people.⁴ Because of the large numbers of people being saved, the high priest saw the church as an explicit threat that required his immediate and definite attention (5:22-33).

The example of the early church as presented in Acts 6 should serve as a model for all New Testament churches. However, a survey conducted by the writer shows that about 23% of deacons do not have a vision for growth. Anyone not having a heart for growth will probably be a negative influence in his congregation. If this is the case, a deacon may inhibit growth by lack of personal concern or serving as a “veto” man for the church. For example, one survey respondent stated, “Some deacons are not willing to add space for more growth.” This attitude is a sad commentary for those who are supposedly servant-leaders in the church. Such deacons are not leading but dragging behind.

² A. T. Robertson, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 vols. ([Nashville]: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1930; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, n. d.), 72.

³ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, gen. ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1986), 131, n. 18; J. Hastings, ed., *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, 5 vols., (Edinburgh: n. p., 1898-1904), vol. 1 (1898): 421ff., s.v. “Chronology of the NT,” by C. H. Turner.

⁴ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of The Acts of the Apostles* (Lutheran Book Concern, 1934; The Wartburg Press, 1944; Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1961), 239.

A Complaining Church

Despite the tremendous growth of the early church as depicted in the book of Acts, a “complaint” (or, “murmuring,” KJV) began which threatened its fellowship, unity, and fruitfulness. Coming from the Greek word *gogguzo*, Robertson says it means to “mutter” or to “murmur,” and is “the secret grumblings that buzz away till they are heard.”⁵ It is the same type of complaining referred to throughout Bible history (Exodus 16:2, 7, 8, 9, 12; Numbers 17:5, 10; John 7:12; Philippians 2:14; 1 Peter 4:9).

The problem stemmed from the church’s having two “classes” of people, one which was annoyed because they believed the widows from their group had been neglected in the daily distribution of food. The distinction between the “Hebrews” and the “Hellenists” is one that is better understood by designating them as “Hebraic Jews” and “Grecian Jews.”⁶ The Hebraic Jews, having dwelled in or near Jerusalem, were quite traditional in their outlook. The Grecian (or Hellenistic) Jews, having lived outside Jerusalem and having been heavily influenced by contemporary culture, were not so traditional in their outlook. The former used the Hebrew Bible, while the latter probably used the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Old Testament). The Hebraic Jews spoke Aramaic and Hebrew, while the Grecian Jews probably spoke only Greek, not being fluent in the mother tongue. All these differences led the groups to worship in different ways and places.

⁵ Robertson, 72.

⁶ Richard N. Longenecker, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1981), 9:332, n. 2.

Thus, the two groups differed geographically and linguistically, but more importantly, they differed culturally and ideologically,⁷ having different intellectual orientations.⁸ In other words, these people came from different places, spoke different languages, had different customs, and had different ideas. It is easy to imagine, therefore, how different groups evolved within the Christian community. The prejudices that developed before conversion were brought into the church with a resulting conflict.⁹ With such underlying differences, had there not been a problem over the widows, no doubt some other incident would have occurred.

Whether this complaining was directed against the apostles or others, or whether the complaints were ill-founded or justified, is not known.¹⁰ In any case, there was the

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 329. For a full discussion of the arguments over the intended distinction meant by Luke, see Longenecker 326-330, 332 n. 2.

⁹ Longenecker (329) states, “. . . attitudes and prejudices formed before conversion are often carried over into Christian life--too often the unworthy more than the worthy ones.” He also quotes Manson: “It is possible that the grievance in question was only the symptom of a larger tension between the two groups, arising from broad differences of outlook and sympathy.” [William Manson, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1951), 27-28, as quoted in Longenecker, 330.]; A. T. Robertson (72) points out, “Though they were all Christians here concerned, yet the same line of cleavage existed as among the other Jews (Hebrew or Aramaean Jews and Hellenists).”; William Barclay seems to blame the Hebraic Jews when he states, “The natural consequence was that the spiritually snobbish Aramaic-speaking Jews looked down on the foreign Jews.” [William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*, in *The Daily Study Bible Series*, rev. ed., (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1953; sec. ed., 1955; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 51-52].

¹⁰ J. Rawson Lumby, *The Acts of the Apostles*, in *Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges*, gen. ed. J. J. S. Perowne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1887), 151. Lumby (151) points out, “This may easily have come to pass without any fault on the part of the Twelve, simply from the sudden growth of the number of

potential for a major problem in the church. This situation only proves that growing churches are not exempt from problems, but may, on the contrary, be more prone to distraction.¹¹ No doubt the source of this strife was Satan himself. This New Testament church had the devil mad. Though the devil is not mentioned in the passage by name, he most assuredly used these differences to his advantage (James 3:13-18). Apparently, this was Ironside's assumption, for he refers to "Satan" no less than eight times (five times in the first six paragraphs) in his exposition of Acts 6:1ff.¹² It is probably correct that "Satan's goal was to divide the membership and discourage the leadership . . ."¹³ God's Word specifically identifies Satan as the real enemy in such situations (John 8:44; 1 Peter 5:8).

As the deacon considers the occasion in which the diaconate was formed, it is evident that one of his main goals is to help solve problems in the church. However, when referring back to the survey, 38.5% of the Chairmen of Deacons confessed that there were deacon(s) in their churches who were a source of strife and conflict. That is almost every four out of ten churches. It is a shame that Satan uses such leaders to cause problems. It

Christians." Lenski (241) states that, "The complaint was not directed against the apostles although they must be classed as 'Hebrews.' It seems as though the majority of the congregation consisted of Hebrews, and that the apostles had used assistants from this class for dispensing the needed charity."

¹¹ John Phillips, *Exploring Acts* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986; Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Brothers, 1991), 115.

¹² Henry Allen Ironside, *Lectures on the Book of Acts* (Neptune, N. J.: Loizeaux Brothers, 1943), 150-162.

¹³ Phillips, 116.

may be that the men who are serving as godly and faithful deacons need to hold these troublesome men accountable for their actions. The deacon, of all people, should carefully guard himself against being a source of strife.

A Caring Church

The “distribution” mentioned here is the Greek word *diakonia*, sometimes translated “ministration.” It is from the same root as *diakonos*, which is translated in its general sense as “servant” or “minister” and in its technical sense as “deacon.” What it is referring to specifically in this instance has been variously interpreted as being food and/or money. The New International Version and the Living Bible render it “food.” In 11:29 it is translated “relief.”¹⁴ Robertson states that it is referring to the “help from the common fund provided for all who need it (Acts 4:32-37).”¹⁵ Regardless of whether it is food or money, it is clear that the overall financial administration of the church is not in view (Acts 11:29); the focus of the passage is the help being ministered to the widows in the church.

The background of these widows is unknown. These widows may have moved from other cities in order to be near the Holy City, possibly in order that they might be buried there upon their deaths. If indeed the widows in question had moved from outside Jerusalem, they may have had no near kin to provide for them. Also, since they had become Christians, the temple funds would no longer be available to them.¹⁶ Whatever the

¹⁴ Lumby (151) also believes the reference in 6:1 is to a relief fund.

¹⁵ Robertson, 72.

¹⁶ Longenecker, 330.

reason for their poverty, it is certain that they needed help--and it is certain the church was obligated by Christian love to help. Because of the large number of people (and widows) in the growing church, the need for a new organizational structure became evident.¹⁷

Thus, the deacon ministry was formed in response to a specific need--ministry to the poor and helpless. Churches that are not ministering to these people probably cannot justify having a deacon ministry. For those men who want to help with the rent or utilities of a single mother, widow, etc., petition the church to make funds available. Undoubtedly, the church in America is stingy and self-centered, and it should be a challenge to the deacons to see this changed. These men should take personal responsibility to do ministry. According to the opinion of those responding to the survey, only 42% of deacons are active in weekly ministry to the widows, poor, sick, shut-ins, etc. Deacons who are serving faithfully should make it a primary goal to encourage fellow deacons (or all members for that matter) to be active in service. The deacon, as a Christian leader, is to be a disciplemaker--this means training others. The best way to develop a disciple is by showing him one-on-one, in on-the-job training, how to visit, witness, pray, and study the Scriptures. Take a willing man, spend time with him, and grow in the Lord together.

An Elder-Led Congregational Church

“The twelve,” evidently being led of the Spirit, settled this conflict by setting aside a group of servants that might be responsible for ministering to these widows. The issue was addressed quickly, which is the best way to prevent a small problem from becoming a

¹⁷ Blaiklock, 75.

large and devastating one. This action shows how the early church operated with its leadership and followship. According to Phillips,

. . . although they had the authority to make an arbitrary decision, they wisely chose to involve the whole church in the momentous change now about to be made in the way the affairs of the local church were to be run.

There is no doubt that the local church is to be ruled by its elders. The local church is not a democracy--it is ruled by its Spirit-appointed elders. At the same time, it is not a dictatorship. So here we have the first hint of that happy blending of apostolic authority and congregational activity working towards a united decision--which should characterize all local church affairs.¹⁸

The word "multitude" in Greek is *plethos*, indicating that this was a called meeting for "the whole church, not just the 120."¹⁹ The summons of the twelve to have the whole group come together shows that the congregation was asked to be involved in this major decision taking place in the church.²⁰

The Primary Task of Sharing the Gospel

The apostles realized it was not "desirable" to "leave the word of God."

"Desirable" (*areston*) means "pleasing" or "fit" while "leave" (*kataleipsantas*) means "to

¹⁸ Phillips, 116.

¹⁹ Robertson, 73.

²⁰ F. M. Cross, Jr. has compared the Essene usage of the Hebrew word *rabbim*, "the many," in the Qumran community with the Greek word *to plethos*, "the whole number" or "entire," used in Acts 6:2, 5 and 15:12 to describe the early Jerusalem church's interaction between leadership and congregation. (Longenecker, 332, n. 2) Longenecker comments that, "While neither the Essene encampment at Qumran nor the Jerusalem church could be called in our modern sense a democratic assembly, it is clear that in both the congregation was involved in the deliberations of its leaders." (Longenecker, 332, n. 2.)

As Lumby (152) recognizes that it was "fit that a change in the distributors should be considered in common."

leave behind.”²¹ The apostles saw the folly of neglecting the preaching to which God had called them to perform menial, everyday tasks. Thus, the thrust of this verse is not showing how to solve social problems, but emphasizing that the spreading of the word of God was to be the primary task.²² F. F. Bruce comments:

The apostles wisely determined to put the trouble right at once. It was not their primary business to supervise the financial arrangements of the community or to take an active part in the ‘daylie handreachinge’ (as Coverdale’s version of 1535 calls it). They therefore called the community together and bade them select seven men to be responsible for administering the charitable allocation.²³

The first group of deacons were chosen by the church and set aside by the laying on of the hands of the apostles for the task of serving both their church and their elders (who were the apostles at that time).²⁴ They served their church by settling complaints, by ministering to the poor, and by serving their pastors, thus relieving the apostles of important, but burdensome tasks.

The Nature of the Deacon Ministry

It is appropriate, also, to consider the nature of this ministry by examining the word “deacon.” The word for deacon in the Greek is “*diakonos*,” which is made of the Greek words “*dia*,” through, and “*konos*,” dust. The literal translation then is “through

²¹ Robertson, 73.

²² *The Believer’s Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1991), 1550, n. 6:1.

²³ Bruce, 128.

²⁴ Hermann W. Beyer, “*diakonos*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, trans. and ed. by G. W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1964-76), 2 (1964): 90.

the dust” and gives credence to the humble heart of the genuine servant. It was used primarily in the first century to designate a “tablewaiter.”

The substantive, “deacon” (1 Timothy 3:8-13; Philippians 1:1), is not specifically used in Acts 6, but two of its derivatives are--*diakonia* translated “distribution” in verse 1, and *diakonein* translated “serve” here in verse 2. These two words describe what the new group was to be doing. A. T. Robertson contends that *diakonein* means,

. . . to raise a dust in a hurry, to serve, to minister either at table (John 12:20), or other service (John 12:25f.), to serve as a deacon (1 Timothy 3:10, 13) . . . This word is the same root as *diakonia* in verse 1 and deacon (*diakonos*) . . .²⁵

Therefore, this word has the basic meaning of “servant.” However, it has “emphasis on usefulness rather than inferiority.”²⁶ It describes the type of service expected of every member of the church and is also used to describe Jesus Himself (Mark 10:45; Romans 15:8). As Cowen observes, “although he executes the commands of another,” he is

. . . a servant in the nature of his work, one who serves others, not in his relation to a person who is his master. He is not a slave, as the word *doulos* denotes, but he is a servant voluntarily.²⁷

Various uses of the word in secular settings included the designation of messengers, stewards, bakers, assistant helmsmen, statesmen, maids, or courtiers and

²⁵ Robertson, 73.

²⁶ J. W. Charley, “Deacon,” in *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, gen. ed. J. D. Douglas, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, a division of Zondervan Pub. House, 1974, 1978), 285.

²⁷ Gerald Cowen, *Sermon Starters from the Greek New Testament*, with a foreword by W. A. Criswell (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1985), 54.

eunuchs of kings.²⁸

Although “servant” may seem to carry a negative connotation in today’s world, it is a hallmark in the Christian life. Servanthood is the key to being like Jesus. It is the key to ministering to the people of God.

The Qualifications of the Deacon

Verse three states that the apostles gave direction to the church to choose seven men who would serve them. Since these men would be caring for the people, it was wise to let the people participate in choosing. Although their input was asked for, certain criteria limited who would be set apart. Deacons were to be good men, godly men, and gifted men.²⁹

The Moral Qualifications of the Deacon

The first qualification specified for the prospective deacons was *martureo* and is translated “good reputation” (cf. Acts 10:22; 1 Timothy 5:10). The basic meaning of this word is “to bear witness.”³⁰ A deacon, then, was to bear a good witness in the home, the church, and the community (cf. 1 Timothy 3:8-13). The present tense of this verb indicates that a candidate’s witness among people was to be an ongoing characteristic and trait; they were to continually have a good reputation.

²⁸ Beyer, 91.

²⁹ Phillips, 117.

³⁰ Robertson, 73.

The Spiritual Qualifications of the Deacon

The second qualification the deacon is to possess is being full of the Holy Spirit. Cowen notes that the word “full” (*pleres*) means to “come under the complete influence of some person or idea.”³¹ In this context it means “to be under the complete control of the Holy Spirit, so He directs one’s entire life” (Acts 13:52; Ephesians 5:18).³² When used in this way, to describe a person, it means “one who is constantly characterized by being filled with the Spirit. This was part of his character.”³³

The third qualification for the deacon is to be full of wisdom. To be filled with wisdom primarily means to be filled with the Word of God (Colossians 3:16). The deacon will be extremely handicapped if he does not have the type of godly wisdom brought by a personal, daily, spiritual walk with the Lord Jesus Christ in His Word. This is true because anyone not filled with God’s wisdom will be filled with an earthly, demonic, self-willed wisdom that breeds strife, bitter envy, self-seeking, confusion, and every evil thing (James 3:13-18). Anyone filled with this latter type of wisdom will not be able to settle disputes but will only cause problems among the people. The heavenly wisdom brought by a deep knowledge of God’s Word promotes peace, mercy, gentleness, a willingness to yield, and good fruit. Being filled with godly wisdom, then, will facilitate harmony and unity in the church. Having heavenly wisdom will not only help the deacon settle problems, but also will strengthen his own character with God and keep him from being a

³¹ Cowen, 79.

³² Ibid, 80.

³³ Ibid, 78-79.

problem in the church. The deacon wants to settle problems, not create them.

Wisdom may further be described, according to Charles Stanley, as that which “fills in the gaps between the principles, promises, and commands of God.”³⁴ Wisdom, he says, is often “the tool the Holy Spirit uses to personalize God’s will for our lives.”³⁵ In similar fashion, J. Oswald Sanders says that, “Knowledge is gained by study, but when the Spirit fills a man, he imparts the wisdom to use and apply that knowledge correctly.”³⁶ Thus, the believer is told to pray, not for direction, but for wisdom (James 1:5; Ephesians 5:15-18).

The Holy Spirit and wisdom, then, are seen to be mutual co-workers in the believer’s life. As Stanley further comments, “There is a vital and often-overlooked relationship between wisdom and the Holy Spirit, namely, the Holy Spirit guides the believer in the way of wisdom. To refuse to live wisely is to ignore the leading of the Holy Spirit.”³⁷ Thus, to have wisdom is to have that which “imparts necessary balance to a leader and delivers him from eccentricity and extravagance.”³⁸ It is mandated that the deacon, therefore, have the Holy Spirit operative in his life, continuously applying the wisdom of God in every delicate situation in which he works.

³⁴ Charles Stanley, *The Wonderful Spirit Filled Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1992), 222.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), 52.

³⁷ Stanley, 221.

³⁸ Sanders, 52.

Finally, it should be noted that there is a difference between “natural leadership” and “spiritual leadership.”³⁹ One can have natural skills as a leader but utilize those skills in a carnal manner. Being a natural leader, then, does not automatically qualify one as a spiritual leader. Though some traits and abilities will be common to both natural and spiritual leaders, many differences will be noticed when their attitudes and motives are compared. This truth is illustrated by J. Oswald Sanders in the following chart when he lists the dominate characteristics of each type of leader:

Natural Leader

Self-confident
 Knows men
 Makes own decisions
 Ambitious
 Originates own methods
 Enjoys commanding others
 Motivated by personal considerations
 Independent

Spiritual Leader

Confident in God
 Also knows God
 Seeks to find God's will
 Self-effacing
 Finds and follows God's methods
 Delights to obey God
 Motivated by love for God and man
 God-dependent⁴⁰

In conclusion, it is certain that the first group of deacons met the qualifications of being “full” of the Spirit and wisdom. For instance, it is said of Stephen that “. . . *they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke*” (Acts 6:10).

The Leadership of the Elders (Apostles)

Appointment Requires Accountability

The text also states “. . . whom we may appoint over this business.” Once again,

³⁹ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

evidence is provided that indicates there was strong leadership by the elders in the church. A. T. Robertson notes that the translation should read “shall” rather than “may.”⁴¹ He further suggests that “The action of the apostles follows the choice by the church, but it is promised as a certainty, not as a possibility.”⁴² In line with this, the New International Version reads, “We *will* turn this responsibility over to them [emphasis added] . . .” (Acts 6:3d, NIV).

The word for “appoint” is the same word used in Titus 1:5 for the appointment of the elders to office. Since the appointment is made by the apostles, it is clear that these seven men will be accountable to them. That this new office, Lenski says, as all other ministries in the church, “would be under the guidance and the leadership of the apostles and their divine office, goes without saying.”⁴³

A Call to Service, Not Supervising

The “business” spoken of in this passage does not in any way refer to overseeing the entire direction of the church, the finances, the buildings, or the pastors. That was clearly the job of the apostles (elders, or pastors). The apostles handled the overall direction and finances of the church both before (Acts 4:35-37) and after (Acts 11:29-30) the appointment of the deacons for service.⁴⁴ The word “business” means “need” or

⁴¹ Robertson, 73.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Lenski, 245.

⁴⁴ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 143. Cited Hereafter as *ASBD*.

“necessity” and can refer to “duty” or “service.”⁴⁵ Dr. W.A. Criswell notes the “business” to which they were appointed to in Acts 6 was one of meeting needs:

The church wanted to choose men whom they might appoint over ‘this business’ (*chreias*). In the New Testament that word is used twenty-five times, and every time it means ‘needs.’ The deacon is brought into the house of our Lord to minister to the needs of the congregation.⁴⁶

The business of a deacon, then, is one of caretaking.

A Call To Serve the Elders (Apostles)

Verse four once again portrays the importance of prayer and the spreading of the word. Since the deacons could help out with some of the everyday tasks that had consumed the apostles time, there would be more energy focused on preaching. As Phillips aptly recognizes,

It was not a question of position but of priorities. It was not that the apostles thought it beneath their dignity to run the errands of the church; it was simply a matter of putting first things first. Nobody expects the director of a giant corporation to work in the mail room.⁴⁷

This is not meant to be demeaning of charity or people. The issue is simply one of priority and function within the body of Christ. A worthy comment helps to clarify this issue:

Prayer and the ministry of the word must be the perpetual priority of the leadership of the church. This does not suggest that the ministry of

⁴⁵ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d ed., trans. by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich; rev. by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 884-85. Cited hereafter as *BAGD*.

⁴⁶ W. A. Criswell, *Great Doctrines of the Bible*, vol. 3, *Ecclesiology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1983), 103. Cited hereafter as Criswell, *Doctrines*.

⁴⁷ Phillips, 116-17

benevolence is on a lower level. It is a matter of the roles that God assigns (see Romans 12:4-8).⁴⁸

The apostles, then, were to focus on ministering the “Bread of Life,” not the every day food supplies.⁴⁹

Another interesting lesson can be learned from this passage; the art of delegation. The apostles did what Moses had done before them--they chose capable and godly men to help with the day-to-day tasks of ministry (Deuteronomy 1:9-18). There is something to be said for “the wisdom of divided labor.”⁵⁰

The First Deacons are Appointed

Congregation Participation

According to verse five, the community came to agreement and the argument presumably ceased. “Pleased” can mean that “a vote was taken.”⁵¹ As Henry Allan Ironside comments,

Apparently everybody had an opportunity to express himself. In selecting these seven men, it is amazing how little of church politics you find in it. We so often come up against that in Christian work. I do not know of any worse form of politics than that wherein someone tries to

⁴⁸ *The Spirit Filled Life Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1991), 1635, n. 6:4. Hereafter cited as *SFLB*.

⁴⁹ Lenski, 242.

⁵⁰ William Owen Carver, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1916), 63.

⁵¹ Robertson, 74.

dominate or control a certain situation. There was nothing of that here.⁵²

Final Approval by the Elders (Apostles) Through Ordination

Verse six shows that it was the apostles, not the whole church, that laid their hands on these new servants.⁵³ The NIV states, "They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them" (Acts 6:6). F. F. Bruce insists, "It was the community as a whole that selected these seven men and presented them to the apostles for their approbation; it was the apostles who appointed them to their office."⁵⁴ John Polhill, Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, agrees when he asserts,

The selection of the seven is followed by their installation. The congregation chose them and presented them to the apostles. The apostles confirmed the congregational decision by laying their hands on them.⁵⁵

Thus, the apostles rightly reserved the privilege of giving the final affirmation in that "they certainly would judge best concerning the spiritual fitness of the chosen seven."⁵⁶

The laying on of hands by the Apostles was evidently an act of ordination. It was

⁵² Ironside, 157.

⁵³ *The Criswell Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1979), 1285, n. 6:1, 3. Cited hereafter as *CSB*. This is also the view of Lenski (246-47); Robertson (74); Longenecker (331); Lumby (154); and the overwhelming majority of others.

⁵⁴ Bruce, 130.

⁵⁵ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, in *The New American Commentary*, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 182. Polhill (182, n. 15) also notes the following: "The Greek of v. 6 could be construed to mean that the congregation laid hands on the seven, but the apostles are the most likely antecedent both grammatically and contextually."

⁵⁶ Lumby, 151.

similar to the Old Testament commissioning of Joshua by Moses (Numbers 27:18-23), and is a practice found elsewhere in the New Testament (Acts 13:3, 14:23; 1 Timothy 4:14, 5:22; 2 Timothy 1:6; Titus 1:5). This act officially symbolized that the apostles were transferring responsibility and authority for ministry to the church's poor to the deacons. Thus, Bruce says, "In the present instance the imposition of apostolic hands formally associated the seven with the twelve, as their deputies to discharge a special duty."⁵⁷

A Blessing From Above

Based on the report in verse seven, the result of this new organizational structure was the blessing of God. The church not only multiplied, but multiplied greatly. The tense of the verb multiply "indicates continuous action in past time."⁵⁸ Hence, the church was in a continuous state of growth. Even many of the once rebellious priests were softened and saved by the preaching of the gospel. Thus, the work of the deacon ought to foster the church's mission of spreading the gospel to the whole world. When a deacon is wondering what he can do, Polhill suggests he take his "cue" from Stephen and Philip. He states, "In the rest of Acts, nothing is made of their administrative duties. What one finds them doing is bearing their witness, even to martyrdom."⁵⁹

To end this section, it is appropriate to admonish the deacon to be a personal soul-

⁵⁷ Bruce, 130. For other comments on ordination, see "The Practice of Ordination" in *Chapter 11: Practical Concerns Relating to the Deacon Ministry*.

⁵⁸ Ray Summers, *Essentials of New Testament Greek* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1950), 55.

⁵⁹ Polhill, 183.

winner. Almost 20% of the Chairmen of Deacons who responded to the survey admitted that they personally had not led anyone to faith in Christ. If this is true among the Chairmen, then the implication for the rest of the body is probably even more grim. Anyway, the main issue for a deacon who has never led anyone to Christ is whether or not he is willing to start today and be committed to this mission of the church. If there is no willingness to learn, by all means, he should not hesitate in stepping down.

To help encourage the deacon (and others) to share the gospel, the commitment of Mr. Edmund "Bud" Whittaker, Chairman of Deacons, FBC Jacksonville, Florida, will be shared. He has set a fine example of being a Spirit-filled deacon, and, having done so, has gained the trust and love of his pastors and his fellow deacons. When asked whether he is committed to sharing the gospel, Mr. Whittaker responded:

Our focus, both my wife and I, is to serve Jesus through the church. I often times tell the men in our meetings, and what have you, that the crown jewel of all the church's organizations is the Sunday School, but the jewel and the crown of the Sunday School is outreach--reaching men and women, boys and girls for Jesus. And that should be our focus. I believe that all men should be soul-winners.⁶⁰

Brother Edmund is not merely stating a maxim; he has personally led several thousand people to faith in Christ.

⁶⁰ Edmund H. "Bud" Whittaker, Chairman of Deacons, First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida, interview by author, 27 September 1995, Tape recording, at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida.

CHAPTER 4

A SURVEY OF 1 TIMOTHY 3:8-13.

Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, {9} holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. {10} But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. {11} Likewise their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. {12} Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. {13} For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

1 Timothy 3:8-13

The Deacons' Ministry Recognized

"Likewise deacons . . ." 1 Timothy 3:8a

Paul has just finished giving the qualifications for the "bishop" (lit. "overseer," *episkopos*), and now begins to outline the expected character of the "deacons" (lit. "servants," *diakonous*). The Greek word *diakonos* ("deacon") is used here in a technical sense, thus designating a specific office.¹ There are only three clear references in the New Testament to the office of deacon, as designated by the noun *diakonos*: 1 Timothy 3:8, 13 and Philippians 1:1. Though the official designation is used only these few times, it still provides a clear indication that two offices were recognized by Paul at this later time in

¹ This more formal use can be compared to the account in Acts 6, where derivatives of *diakonos* are used to describe the service being rendered but without actually specifying those rendering such service as "deacons."

church history (see Philippians 1:1).² Ralph Earle notes, “This distinction of two groups with differing functions is prominent in the pastoral Epistles.”³

The word *diakonos* was the common term for a “table waiter” during the New Testament era, indicating the servant or helper aspect of the position.⁴ When this term is compared to that of “bishop” or “overseer” (*episkopos*) in verse one, it is easy to detect a precise difference in meaning. That is, the overseers (elders/pastors/bishops) have been entrusted with overseeing and administrating the church, while the “deacons” or “servants” (*diakonos*) have been charged with ministering to and serving the people.

George Knight III gives clarity to this suggestion when he says,

Apparently the ministry of the latter [*diakonoī*] is so specifically and exclusively that of service that the name designating their function becomes uniquely theirs . . .

. . . . As in the case of the επισκοπος [*episkopos*], the noun διακονος [*diakonos*] is both the designation of an office and a descriptive indication of what one who holds the office does.⁵

The *New American Commentary* recognizes this distinction in the following statement:

Bible scholars view the overseer as providing administrative leadership for the church. They see the deacon as helping the overseer in the ministries or

² For a discussion on the origin of the deacon ministry prior to this time, refer to *Appendix A: Does Acts 6:1-7 Present the Church's First Deacons?*

³ Ralph Earle, “1 Timothy,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1978), 11:367.

⁴ Hermann W. Beyer, “*diakoneo, diakonia, diakonos*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and abrdg. in one vol. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1985), 152-55.

⁵ George W. Knight, III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, eds. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1992), 168.

work of the church.⁶

“Likewise” (*hosautos*) serves the double purpose of distinguishing and comparing the bishop and the deacons.⁷ By distinction, it shows these two offices to be different and separate. By comparison, it shows that deacons, in similar fashion to overseers, are to possess certain spiritual qualities. Lenski relates the “must be” of verse two to the statements in verses 8ff, thus recognizing an equally strong importance for the qualifications of the deacon.⁸ Donald Guthrie comments,

Since they [deacons] were particularly concerned with the distribution of the Church’s charities it was as essential for them as for the presiding elders to be morally equipped for the task.⁹

The Deacons’ Moral Qualifications

“ . . . deacons must be reverent, not double tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money . . . ” 1 Timothy 3:8bcde

The first qualification given is that a deacon be “reverent” (*semnos*). Many scholars consider it to be an umbrella term, encompassing the qualifications that follow. It is easy to make a connection between this qualification and the requirement in Acts 6 of

⁶ Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr., *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, in *The New American Commentary*, gen. ed. David S. Dockery, vol. 34 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 115. Cited hereafter as Lea.

⁷ Knight, 168.

⁸ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus, and to Philemon* (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1946), 594, as cited in Lea, 116, n. 67.

⁹ Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, in *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, gen. ed. R. V. G. Tasker, vol. 14 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1957), 83.

having a “good reputation.” The New International Version translates it, “worthy of respect.” It carries the ideas of both “gravity and dignity.”¹⁰ Moule considers it to mean both “seriousness of purpose and self-respect in conduct.”¹¹ J. H. Bernard speaks of it as “an intense conviction of the seriousness of life, and the difficulty of realizing the Christian ideal.”¹² Though the deacon is to be serious, he is not to be “a cold, joyless person.”¹³ Rather, he is to have a character that “merits respect” and expresses “dignity, earnestness of purpose, and winsome attractiveness.”¹⁴ Trench lists *hieroprepes* as a synonym for *semnos* and notes that it “expresses that which befits a sacred person, thing, or act.”¹⁵ Barclay says *semnos* “describes the man who carries himself towards other men with a combination of dignified independence and kindly consideration . . . he should ever display in his life the majesty of Christian living.”¹⁶ Any believer who manifests this trait as an all

¹⁰ W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, 4 vols. (Westwood, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1940), s. v. “*semnos*,” (cited hereafter as Vine) quoted in Earle, 367.

¹¹ C. F. D. Moule, “The Problem of the Pastoral Epistles: A Reappraisal,” in *Bulletin of John Rylands Library* 47 (March 1965): 55 as quoted in Earle, 367.

¹² J. H. Bernard, *The Pastoral Epistles*, in *The Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges*, [gen. ed. J. J. S. Perowne] (Cambridge: University Press, 1899; repr. 1906), 40.

¹³ John MacArthur, Jr., *1 Timothy*, in *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 127.

¹⁴ Lea, 116.

¹⁵ Richard C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 348, as cited by MacArthur, 127.

¹⁶ William Barclay, *More New Testament Words* (New York: Harper, 1958), 144, 145, as cited by Earle, 369, n. 8.

compelling attitude of life will ensure an open door to witness among those who are looking for truth and guidance.

Deacons are not to be “double-tongued” (*dilogos*). The basic idea of the word is “saying the same thing twice,” “repeating,” or being “double in speech.”¹⁷ This means that something can be repeated wrongly (i.e., misrepresentation), or that something can be repeated that should not be repeated at all (i.e., gossip). To misrepresent is to relate different messages to different people, especially with the “intent to deceive.”¹⁸ Thus, the deacon is not to be “deceitful.”¹⁹ To gossip is to be a “tale-bearer,”²⁰ which is often spoken against in Scripture (i.e., Proverbs 11:13; 18:8; 20:19a). Stated plainly, “The deacon is not to spread rumors to different groups of listeners.”²¹ To do either of these is to indicate that one is “insincere” about his ministry.²²

The admonition against being “double-tongued” is critical for the deacon, especially since he is set aside to visit in homes and will deal with many delicate, and

¹⁷ Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 151-52.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁹ *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon*, abrg. ed., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 173. Cited hereafter as *L&S*.

²⁰ Guthrie, 83.

²¹ Lea, 116.

²² Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d ed., trans. by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich; rev. and aug. by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 198. Cited hereafter as *BAGD*.

possibly confidential, situations. This is wisely noted in the following article:

The exclusion of those who are “doubletongued” (v. 8) may be evidence that the work of the deacons brought them into close contact with the everyday lives of the church members, as would occur in visiting the sick and ministering to the other physical needs of fellow Christians. Such service would both give them greater knowledge of items for gossip and allow them greater opportunity to spread such gossip, thus making it crucial that they should not be prone to talebearing.²³

Likewise, Bernard cautions that, “Such a habit would be fatal to the usefulness of an official whose duties would necessarily bring him into close and frequent association with all classes.”²⁴ Many times gossip is not shared with an intent to do harm, but is unwisely practiced in “the spirit of good fellowship, desiring to please . . .”²⁵

When the issues involved are more public in nature, the deacon needs to be consistent in his assertions and be totally open with the people and the pastor. Kenneth Wuest has quoted another writer as saying,

Persons who are in an intermediate position, having in the same department, chiefs and subordinates, are exposed to a temptation to speak of the same matter in different tones and manner, according as their interlocutor is above or below them.²⁶

Another commentator has said, “It can be dangerous when a man tries to please

²³ Fred A. Grissom, “Deacon, Deaconess,” in the *Holman Bible Dictionary for Windows* (Hiawatha, Iowa: Parsons Technology, 1994; *The Holman Bible Dictionary* is copyrighted by Holman Bible Pub., 1991.), n. p.

²⁴ Bernard, 57.

²⁵ Charles A. Trentham, *Studies in Timothy* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1959), 43.

²⁶ Kenneth S. Wuest, *The Pastoral Epistles in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1952; Copyright renewed by Jeannette I. Wuest, 1980), 59. Cited hereafter as Wuest, *Pastoral Epistles*.

everybody or doesn't have the courage to stand on his own two feet."²⁷ This is not a reference to being involved in constant church fights over personal wants or rights; that is sin. It merely means that "A deacon must be a man whose words can be depended upon."²⁸

The next qualification is "not given to much wine." The word "wine" (*oinos*) is the most commonly used word in the New Testament for fermented grape juice.²⁹ In first century Palestine, wine was a common household beverage because of poor quality water. This practice did not lead to widespread alcoholism, however, probably because the customary procedure was to mix about three parts water to one part wine.³⁰

The word "given" (*prosecho*) is one that prohibits "addiction."³¹ It is a present active participle that denotes a continuous, habitual practice. It means to "occupy oneself with" or to "devote or apply oneself to."³² Thus, it is admitted that this particular text does not specify abstinence from "wine" (*oinos*). The deacon, however, is not to occupy

²⁷ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible*, 5 vols. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1983), 5:443.

²⁸ Henry Allen Ironside, *Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Bros., 1947), 80.

²⁹ Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 3d. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1957, 1961, 1966; Paperback ed., 1983), 1167-69.

³⁰ Gerald Cowen, "New Testament Wine," chapter in his *Sermon Starters from the Greek New Testament*, foreword by W. A. Criswell (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1985), 75-77.

³¹ Bernard, 57.

³² *BAGD*, 714.

himself with intoxicants, especially in light of his close and frequent association with hurting people. Bernard states, "Again, the appropriateness of such a caution is plain, when the house-to-house visitation entailed by the office of the *diakonos* is remembered."³³ Probably because the deacon will constantly be in homes, this qualification is stated more strongly than the one afforded pastors (1 Timothy 3:3).³⁴

Considering this admonition against "addiction," then, is it proper for deacons, pastors (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7), or other Christians (Titus 2:3) to use alcohol or other stimulants, socially or otherwise? Though this passage does not call for abstinence, the Bible offers strong cautions against using intoxicants. First, the Bible offers numerous warnings concerning the negative effects of alcohol (and other stimulants). For instance, the first two times wine is mentioned in Scripture, it is associated with immorality (Genesis 9:21; 19:32). The continued use of alcohol facilitates backsliding and disobedience (Isaiah 5:11-13; 28:7; Hosea 4:11). Consuming alcohol can be the practice of fools (Proverbs 20:1) and the source of needless woes, pains, and sorrows (23:29-35). Poverty will come to those who mix with drunkards and gluttons (Proverbs 23:19-21). Furthermore, wine often leads to injustice in law (Isaiah 5:20-23) and business (Habakkuk 2:15).

There are also consequences for both the believer and unbeliever concerning their relationship with the church and with God. The believer who consumes alcohol may require church discipline (1 Corinthians 5:11-13). For the unbeliever, Scripture plainly asserts that a drunkard shall not enter the kingdom of heaven (1 Corinthians 6:9-11;

³³ Bernard, 57.

³⁴ Earle, 367; Guthrie, 84.

Galatians 5:19-21).³⁵

A second consideration for not drinking is that such behavior is not edifying. Partaking of wine may cause a new convert to stumble, thus doing him harm (Romans 14:13-23). The Christian does not want to bring harm to his brother, but rather, be consistently edifying him. Similarly, drinking wastes time, time that could be utilized in reaching the lost (1 Peter 4:1-11). Also, being filled with wine leads to dissipation and debauchery (Ephesians 5:18), as exemplified by the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:13).³⁶ Thus, it is better that one seek to be controlled by the Spirit's filling, which leads to an obedient service in the Lord (Ephesians 5:18-21).

In America, the deacon will undoubtedly be faced with the ordeal of working among many alcoholics and their families. Therefore, wisdom demands that his witness and influence not be tainted by the unnecessary habit of consuming wine. Such practices can cause him to be a stumbling block rather than a blessing to these and other people. Because the deacon holds a position that may command considerable influence in the church and community, he should exercise extreme caution in this area. If he wants to

³⁵ Commenting on the "works of the flesh" in Galatians 5:19-21, James M. Boice makes the following note: "Paul adds a solemn warning, saying that those who habitually practice such things will never inherit God's kingdom. This does not mean that if a Christian falls into sin through getting drunk, or some such thing, he thereby loses his salvation. The tense of the verb (present) indicates a habitual continuation in fleshly sins rather than an isolated lapse, and the point is that those who continually practice such sins give evidence of having never received God's Spirit." (James Montgomery Boice, "Galatians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, 12 vols. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1976], 10:497.)

³⁶ For a fuller discussion of the use of wine and other stimulants, refer to *Appendix C: The Christian's Use of Wine*.

help, rather than hinder the Lord's work, he might do well to heed this advice:

If an individual by drinking wine either causes others to err through his example or abets a social evil which causes others to succumb to its temptations, then in the interests of Christian love he ought to forego the temporary pleasures of drinking in the interests of heavenly treasures.³⁷

In addition, using intoxicants is mentioned in the Bible as being a specifically unwise activity for any leader (and thus, especially for a church leader):

The words of King Lemuel, the utterance which his mother taught him: {2} What, my son? And what, son of my womb? And what, son of my vows? {3} Do not give your strength to women, Nor your ways to that which destroys kings. {4} It is not for kings, O Lemuel, It is not for kings to drink wine, Nor for princes intoxicating drink; {5} Lest they drink and forget the law, And pervert the justice of all the afflicted. {6} Give strong drink to him who is perishing, And wine to those who are bitter of heart.
*Proverbs 31:1-6*³⁸

A word of wisdom given in *The New American Commentary* will serve well in summarizing the thought behind this qualification:

Total abstinence today from alcohol would guard the deacon from the clutches of intoxicants. It would provide a credible witness to a society that needs help in combating alcoholism.³⁹

The next qualification prohibits the love of "dishonest gain" (*aischroderdes*). It is

³⁷ Irwin Woodworth Raymond, *The Teaching of the Early Church on the Use of Wine and Strong Drink* (New York: Columbia University, 1927), 88, cited by MacArthur, 127.

³⁸ Proverbs 31, given by King Lemuel, is a passage rich with wisdom for those who would lead. It expresses common requirements of any good leader, many of which are found in the qualifications of a deacon: (1) immorality is prohibited, v. 3a; (2) intoxicants are discouraged, vv. 4-7 [vv. 6-7 refer to medicinal uses]; (3) he is to defend the helpless, poor, and needy, vv. 8-9; and (4) he is to seek and cherish a good home life, vv. 10-31.

³⁹ Lea, 116.

defined as being “fond of dishonest gain” or “greedy for money.”⁴⁰ This adjective is composed of two Greek words, *aischros*, having the general meaning of “shame [or . . .] disgrace,”⁴¹ or “base [or] dishonorable,”⁴² and *kerdos*, meaning “‘gain,’ ‘advantage,’ [or] ‘profit.’”⁴³ Ironside simply states in his sermon on 1 Timothy 3, that deacons are not to be “men who are seeking to enrich themselves.”⁴⁴ Gordon Fee says it signifies, “loving money to the point of questionable integrity.”⁴⁵ The importance of this qualification is heightened by its constant presence in the Pastoral Epistles, being given as a requirement for every officer in the church⁴⁶ (Titus 1:7; cf. 1 Timothy 3:3; 1 Peter 5:2). Donald Guthrie has stated,

The two further comments forbidding wine addicts and men with insatiable appetites for base gain are both expressed in stronger terms than in the case of the overseers, no doubt because their house-to-house visitation would expose them more pointedly to these evils.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ BAGD, 25.

⁴¹ “Filthiness, Filthy,” in *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, eds. W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, Jr., One vol. ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1985), New Testament Section:237-38. Cited hereafter as *Vine’s, Expository*.

⁴² Thayer, 154.

⁴³ Heinrich Schlier, “*kerdos, kerdaino*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and abrdg. in one vol. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1985), 428.

⁴⁴ Ironside, 81.

⁴⁵ Fee, 87.

⁴⁶ Knight, 169.

⁴⁷ Guthrie, 84.

It appears that this prohibition represents a whole frame of mind and attitude toward one's view of money; it speaks of one's having a greedy spirit. An inappropriate love for money can be problematic, as shown by Paul in his first letter to Timothy:

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. 1 Timothy 6:10

Thus, the deacon is admonished not to be a source of shame or disgrace for the church by exemplifying a greedy eagerness to gain money, whether by honest or dishonest means.

This directive can be violated in a number of ways, some being more blatant than others. Bernard insists, "The reference is plainly to the illicit disposal of Church funds, a temptation which would specially press upon those concerned with the distribution of alms."⁴⁸ MacArthur seems to follow this line of thought when he states,

He must not use his office as a means to make money. That was an important quality in the early church, since deacons would routinely handle money as part of their official duties. They would distribute money to widows, orphans, and others in need. The temptation would always be there to steal from those funds, as did Judas (John 12:4-6). It was essential, then, that deacons be free from any love of money that could compromise their honesty.⁴⁹

Strauch realizes that the temptation could be to steal indirectly, by skimming the funds:

Deacons handle money--other people's money, the church's money--and where money is there are always problems. Money is an irresistible magnet for many people. They are deceived by the burning passion of greed. Such people seek out positions that provide access to money, although they do not admit their true desires. Such people may not actually steal cash. Instead, they may misdirect church funds to their own so-called 'ministry expenses': gas, car repairs, meals, travel, and home. (Contrast Nehemiah

⁴⁸ Bernard, 57.

⁴⁹ MacArthur, 128.

5:14-18.) This still is wrongfully seeking gain that belongs to others; it is 'sordid gain.'⁵⁰

But apart from these dishonest acts, it is also true that the deacon should not use this position to make honest money. The *New American Commentary* states,

The use of this term does not merely prohibit the quest for gain in a dishonest manner. That would obviously be blatantly wrong. What Paul prohibited was the use of a spiritual office for material benefit, even if no dishonesty or illegality was present. The deacon is not to be perceived as greedy.⁵¹

As Charles Trentham comments,

The modern temptation would not be for the deacon to pilfer, but to use his position to a financial advantage. There have been deacons who have become deeply offended because they were not given business from the church. Money, of itself, is not filthy; but when money is sought where none is due, it becomes filthy. The deacon's true position is one from which to give not to get.⁵²

This temptation to "greediness" may also manifest itself in an even more subtle way. If a deacon is greedy, then the same principle of "making money," used by him to guide his personal finances, will generally be imposed on the church. He will be more interested in keeping than giving, thus preventing the church from learning the joy of generosity. He may have more than most others in the church (due to hard work and a definite commitment to savings) but generally will give little or nothing. The intimidation he provides at each business meeting eventually results in hoarding large sums of money.

⁵⁰ Alexander Strauch, *The New Testament Deacon: The Church's Minister of Mercy* (Littleton, Colorado: Lewis & Roth Pub., 1992), 99.

⁵¹ Lea, 117.

⁵² Trentham, 44.

He can be counted on to protect the church funds by vetoing all ministry ideas that require expenditures, fighting to underpay the pastor and staff, or becoming belligerent when someone spends money without his approval.

This man is often present among those deacons who consider themselves overseers or administrators. He may believe he has "seniority" or "tenure" due to his long-term official membership on the "board." He becomes convinced that God has called him to be the sole defender of the treasury. Without realizing it, he becomes possessive of "his" church budget. This is evident by his unwavering attendance at deacons' meetings and business meetings (though he's too busy for church-wide visitation). Consequently, if he is accepted as the chief financial officer, the church will be characterized by low giving to the poor and needy. Since he has not learned the joy of giving, neither will the church under his leadership. Remember the motto: "Save at all costs."

An example of this kind of attitude may be illustrated by sharing the personal experience of Pastor X:

Pastor X loved his church and wanted God's best for it. The church was small, so he humbly prayed that funds would be made available to make several needed repairs. The parking lot had chug-holes and had never been paved; the baptistery was cracked and leaked when filled with water. More importantly, there had not been any money available for a poor young mother who needed help with her rent. Nevertheless, after pastoring the church for almost a year, his prayers were "answered." He discovered the financial administrators of the church (the deacon "board") had accumulated over one hundred thousand dollars in a separate savings account they had set up for the church. These men had not taken any of this money for their own use (they were very honest in this respect). However, these funds were not "accessible" for ministry. Though these men did not "steal" money, it is certain that they did "rob God."

Another humorous, though fabricated, story may help to portray the point. This one takes

place at Your Baptist Church:

One Sunday morning a new church member overheard a loud voice in the hall. An irate "board" member was blessing the janitor out, having noticed two new brooms standing in the hall closet. This man let the janitor know, in no uncertain terms, that it was highly unacceptable to buy two brooms, when only one was needed. After the discussion ended, the new member approached the janitor and asked why the man was so upset about such a seemingly small matter. The janitor responded, 'You would be upset too, if everything you had given last year was spent on those two brooms.'

Ken Smith, an associate pastor at First Baptist Church of Woodstock, Georgia, recounts another humorous truism:

Some people want to put three dollars in the offering plate and then expect to get three dollars of enjoyment, three dollars of excitement, and three dollars of Heaven in a brown paper bag and take it home with them. And, that's basically what they want out of church.⁵³

Certainly, this doesn't express the joy of giving. If a man has not learned to give, then he cannot lead the church to give. Being thrifty is a Christian virtue, but neglecting a lost and dying world by hoarding and being stingy is wrong.

A man's attitude toward money is extremely important when considering him as a deacon. If he has financial integrity, his ministry will be a source of blessing (Numbers 16:15; 1 Samuel 12:3-5; Matthew 8:20; Acts 20:33-34; Philippians 4:10-12). Conversely, if he does not, terrible consequences can follow (1 Samuel 2:13-17; 2 Kings 5:20-27; Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 7:9-13; Luke 11:39; 16:14; 20:47; John 12:4-6; 1 Timothy 6:5-10; Titus 1:11). Thus, the deacon should be above reproach in his business dealings, both in the community and the church. He should be a man who does not "rob God" but who

⁵³ Ken Smith, Associate Pastor, First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Georgia, interview by author, 25 September 1995, Woodstock, Georgia, tape recording.

gives systematically, consistently, generously, and cheerfully. A deacon is not required to be rich; he should simply set an example of sacrificial giving based on his available means.

The Deacons' Spiritual Qualifications

“. . . holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.” 1 Timothy 3:9

“Holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience” is the next requirement for the deacon. “Holding” (*exw*) means to “keep” or “preserve.”⁵⁴ This requirement necessitates that the deacon already be regenerate, having experienced the new birth. One cannot keep that which he has not received in the first place. However, the emphasis of the requirement, as shown by the present tense of “holding,” is that the deacon continually preserve the mystery of the faith.

The same word is used in Luke 19:20 where the servant “kept” the Master’s money by wrapping it in a handkerchief. By doing this, he treated it as a “keepsake.”⁵⁵ Therefore, it is incumbent upon the deacon that he should hold the mystery of the gospel as a “keepsake,” sort of a golden nugget given by his Heavenly Father. He is to cherish it.

However, unlike the disobedient servant in Luke 19:20, the deacon is also to invest this keepsake of faith by sharing it with others. When the deacon shares his keepsake with the lost, he is being a soul-winner, and when he shares it with a fellow Christian, he is edifying. The amazing thing about this keepsake, however, is that even when one gives it away, he ends up with even more of it. “Holding” does not require that the deacon teach,

⁵⁴ *BAGD*, 332.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

as with the bishop (1 Timothy 3:2), but he is required to have a deep, solid grasp of New Testament truth that he can share with others.

The sharing of a faithful deacon one cold, snowy, wintery day led to the conversion of a young man. This deacon showed up at church with a song on his heart, and when the preacher could not make it due to the inclement weather, he faithfully stepped forward to share a few things from God's word. His message brought conviction upon Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the greatest Baptist preacher of the past century, and caused him to accept Christ. Thank God for men such as this deacon.

The "faith" (*pisteuw*) the deacon is to continually hold is "... the content of the Christian religion. It is objective Christian truth."⁵⁶ Thus, the deacon is to understand and hold to the "truths of the Christian religion."⁵⁷ A definite article precedes "faith," showing that it is not "a faith," but "the faith," that is being spoken of in this context. This is "the faith" expressed by New Testament Christianity. Hence, the deacon is not being called upon to have a mere acquaintance with world religion or to adhere to a belief in a generic god who can be worshiped by anyone in any way he pleases. It is not a mandate to believe that everyone's religion is fine, allowing people to go to heaven if they are sincere about their beliefs. It means having deep convictions about and a specific understanding of the divinity of Christ, salvation by grace, and God's wonderful plan through the ages.

"Mystery" is a word that was used in the secular life of the Greeks as that which

⁵⁶ Lea, 117.

⁵⁷ Earle, 367.

was once “unknown to the masses but disclosed to the initiated.”⁵⁸ However, in the New Testament it “refers to the essential truth of the gospel, especially the saving character of Christ’s death, which was once hidden (in God) but now revealed by the Spirit.” Thus, it denotes, “not what is beyond knowledge, but what, being once hidden, is now revealed to those with spiritual discernment.”⁵⁹ Earle says “mystery” in the New Testament refers to “the secret of salvation through Jesus Christ, which is revealed by the Holy Spirit to all who will believe” (Cf. Romans 16:25-27; Ephesians 3:8-11).⁶⁰ To be more specific about the content of this “mystery of the faith,” MacArthur surmises,

The mystery of the faith is the New Testament revelation. Such truth was not revealed in the Old Testament. It encompasses the mystery of the Incarnation of Christ (1 Tim. 3:16), of the indwelling of Christ in believers (Col. 1:26-27), of the unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ (Eph. 1:9; 3:4-6), of the saving gospel (Col. 4:3), of lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:7), and of the rapture of the church (1 Cor. 15:51-52).⁶¹

A “pure conscience” (*katharos suneidesis*) is one that will not be duped with false doctrine, lead others astray, or deviate from the faith (Cf. 1 Timothy 4:1-5).⁶² W. E. Vine writes, “A pure conscience is that which has been cleansed by the blood of Christ, Hebrews 10:22, and is exercised to avoid offense towards God and men, Acts 24:16.”⁶³

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Guthrie, 84.

⁶⁰ Earle, 367.

⁶¹ MacArthur, 128.

⁶² Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1981), 245.

⁶³ Vine, 56, as quoted in Earle, 367.

J. N. D. Kelly states, "Its basic meaning is man's inner awareness of the moral quality of his own actions."⁶⁴ Lea states, "To have a 'clear conscience,' a Christian leader must give continual obedience to God's truth as revealed in Scripture (cf. 1 John 1:7)."⁶⁵ MacArthur says, "It is not enough merely to believe the truth (cf. James 2:19), deacons must also live it."⁶⁶ Thus, a pure conscience comes from "knowing that one honestly and genuinely holds these truths and lives by them."⁶⁷ It is interesting that Paul's only other use of "pure," outside the Pastoral Epistles, is in Romans 14:20 where he uses it in dealing with conscience in regard to drinking wine and eating meat offered to idols. There he admonishes Christians not to participate in things that could serve as a stumbling block for others. Thus, to have a pure conscience most simply means that the deacon will live out the truths of the Christian faith in everyday life.

That it is possible for the conscience to become corrupt or defiled (Titus 1:15-16) is exemplified in the "shipwrecked" faith of Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Timothy 1:19-20). Dale Moody states that, ". . . the conscience that knows no more consciousness of sin no longer exists; and faith becomes hypocritical palaver that is professed but not practiced."⁶⁸ As Strauch states,

⁶⁴ J. N. D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1972), 47, as cited in Strauch, 100.

⁶⁵ Lea, 117.

⁶⁶ MacArthur, 128.

⁶⁷ Malcolm O. Tolbert, "1 Timothy," in *The Layman's Bible Book Commentary*, 24 vols. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1980), 22:111.

⁶⁸ Moody, 245.

A Christian can't hold to the faith with a pure conscience and live in sexual immorality, pilfer money, hate a brother, divorce a Christian spouse, or mix falsehood with the gospel. The New Testament never allows people to separate life and doctrine.⁶⁹

The clear or good conscience on the other hand is positive and useful in the believer's life. Referring to Moody again, he remarks,

The positive function of a good conscience makes it, like the sources of the Jordan, one of the tributaries of love along with a pure heart and sincere faith.⁷⁰

By having a good conscience, one has a lifestyle that backs up his profession of faith, and gives credence to his testimony. This truth is brought out in the following Scripture:

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; {16} having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. 1 Peter 3:15-16

Preserving the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience was certainly exemplified by Stephen, who was "full of faith" (Act 6:5). He eloquently defended the truths relating to Jesus Christ and His gospel, while working his way through the history of God's faithfulness toward Israel and their rebellion toward Him (Acts 6:8-8:3). The content of Stephen's speech exemplifies his deep knowledge of God's Word and, thus, the level of his faith; the fervency of his speech indicates the extent of his pure conscience.

⁶⁹ Strauch, 100.

⁷⁰ Moody, 245.

The Deacons' Service Qualifications

"But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless." 1 Timothy 3:10

The word "test" (*dokimazo*) comes "from the stem word *doke* ("watching")."⁷¹ The result of such "testing" can be that someone has been found "reliable," "esteemed," or "valuable."⁷² The purpose is "to test in hope of being successful."⁷³ This testing is important in that the church does not want to set aside leaders who will poorly represent the Lord and His Church. A man should be thoroughly examined "first" (*protos*), which means "in the first place, before, earlier, [or] to begin with,"⁷⁴ and thus means before he is set aside as a leader. Needless to say, it is much easier to place someone in a position than it is to remove him from it. Further, the Bible says, "*Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a bad tooth and a foot out of joint*" (Proverbs 25:19). Thus, those who would heed this command give evidence of godly wisdom.

Who should do this "testing" is made clear by Scripture itself, though it is not addressed directly in this passage. In Acts, however, we see that both the pastors and the people had witnessed their qualifications. No doubt the people had lived among these men and had approved them as being unquestionably dedicated to God and being filled with the

⁷¹ Walter Grundmann, "*dokimos*, [etc.]," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and abrdg. in one vol. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1985), 181.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Guthrie, 84.

⁷⁴ BAGD, 726.

Spirit (Acts 6:5). Their judgment was authenticated by the later testimony of these men, who served even to the point of literally giving their lives for the cause of Christ (Acts 7:59-60).

However, it should be noticed that the elders (apostles, pastors, etc.) were also intricately involved in this process. It was their “pastors” who brought this recommendation to the church (Acts 6:2-3a), who were responsible for appointing them (Acts 6:3b), and who gave their final approval to them through prayer and the laying on of hands (Acts 6:6b). Who else would be more qualified to test these men, especially concerning the doctrinal qualifications related to “holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience”? This is certainly true considering the overall structure of leadership in the church, for the “pastors” have been called and placed by the Holy Spirit to oversee the church (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-3). Dr. Robert E. Naylor has stated,

Let me hasten to say that I think that no man ought to be nominated as a deacon without consulting the pastor. If there is one man in the church that is vitally interested in this selection, it is the pastor. The position to which God has called him and the confidence of the people that his leadership in the church is a work of the Holy Spirit make it necessary to consider his judgment. He is the man in whom all the church should have utmost confidence. His people regard him as a man of God, a man led of the Holy Spirit. They believe that their relationship with him is born of the will of God.⁷⁵

To call major leadership without the approval of the pastor is to practice rebellion against God. However, churches sometimes persist in such practices. For instance, one church recently wanted to ordain several individuals as deacons whom the pastor did not consider to be qualified. When the pastor refused to participate, they called a

⁷⁵ Robert E. Naylor, *The Baptist Deacon* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1955), 37.

denominational leader to help in the ordination. He gladly obliged. This is a sad commentary on that local church and even more so on that denominational leader. It is a shame that anyone purposing to be a servant of the local church would violate so many of its spiritual principles, teaching the church not only by word but by example to rebel against its God-ordained leadership.

Another consideration concerning this testing is of what nature it is to be. As shown above, the time of this testing is certainly to take place prior to being appointed. But how much time? It seems evident that this is not talking about a thirty minute question and answer session one hour prior to the ordination service. It no doubt means that these men are to be observed over a period of time, in order to substantiate that they are meeting the qualifications listed in this passage and that they are actually serving. If a man is not serving, then certainly he should not be set aside as an example of service. Thus, it has been suggested that there may be three stages in this testing, and perhaps all three are being suggested here: (1) test, (2) prove by testing, (3) approve as the result of testing.⁷⁶ As MacArthur points out,

The present tense of the verb indicates an ongoing test, not a one-time test, or probationary period. Deacons are to be continually tested before they officially serve as deacons. The test in view here is the general assessment of a believer's service by the church. Once they become officially recognized as deacons, this evaluation goes on.⁷⁷

Thus, a man should not be "approved" for a lifetime, based on one thirty minute questioning service. He should always be evaluated by the pastor and the congregation

⁷⁶ Earle, 367-8.

⁷⁷ MacArthur, 129.

with respect to his on going service. Hinson says,

Paul expected all Christians to perform a diaconate--caring for the needy, visiting the sick, comforting the bereaved, etc. If during this period they prove themselves blameless, of good reputation, let them be formally enrolled as deacons.⁷⁸

Tolbert states, "Deacons are not to be chosen hurriedly or thoughtlessly . . . it is clear that candidates are to undergo close scrutiny."⁷⁹ At any rate, the selection process for setting men aside as deacons is extremely important and should not be ignored. The verb "testing" is a present tense, indicating an ongoing evaluation and an imperative, thus a command to the Christian church.

"*Being found blameless*" provides a conditional and indicates "provided they are unaccused."⁸⁰ The word "blameless" (*anenkletos*) literally means "being not called in" or "not called to account," thus carrying the meaning of "irreproachable."⁸¹ Litfin's definition is ". . . one who is unaccused, free from any charge at all."⁸² Gordon Fee summarizes the meaning of this qualification by relating it to what has already been said:

Paul is saying, therefore, that when you find men "who keep hold of the revealed truth of the faith with a clear conscience," that is, people whose

⁷⁸ E. Glenn Hinson, "Commentary on 1 Timothy," in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Clifton J. Allen, 12 vols. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1971), 11:319.

⁷⁹ Tolbert, 111.

⁸⁰ Wuest, *Pastoral Epistles*, 61.

⁸¹ Earle, 368.

⁸² A. Duane Litfin, "1 Timothy," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, New Testament ed., eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton: Victor Books, a division of SP Publications, 1983), 738.

behavior is above reproach, then let such "approved" men serve (the verb form of *diakonos*).⁸³

Therefore, if men are scrutinized and found "blameless," then, and only then, are they to be appointed. As Litfin says, "Christlike conduct is required of deacons."⁸⁴

The validity of a man's qualification for this position is ensured in a unique way at Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia. After nominations have been made by the people and suitable screening has taken place through the appropriate committees, the names of the men are presented to the church. However, instead of voting for a man, the members have the opportunity to vote against him, stating the reason why the man may be unqualified. Thus, a man may be disqualified by the people. This is an important consideration, because some church member(s) may be aware of the unholy conduct of a particular candidate--conduct that is unknown to the pastors or other deacons. In any event, such a procedure guarantees that proper precautions are taken before a man is set aside as a deacon. Though there are no fool-proof methods of screening, these measures more readily assure that every potential deacon has maintained a good testimony in the church, the community, and his home.⁸⁵

⁸³ Fee, 88.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Dr. Elmer Towns, Dean of the School of Religion at Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia, interview by author, 25 July 1995, at Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia, tape recorded.

The Deacons' Family Qualifications

"Likewise their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. {12} Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well." 1 Timothy 3:11-12

The Deacons' Wives (vs. 11)

The Recognition of Deacons' Wives

"Likewise, their wives . . ." The word "wives" (*gune*) can be used of both women in general and wives. This word, coupled with the use of "likewise" (*hosautos*), as used in verse 2 above, is said to introduce a third and separate order of officers, "deaconesses." Hence, this verse sometimes has been used to support the ordination of women to the diaconate. However, when a thorough examination of the text is made, it is clear that this is not a reference to deaconesses, but to the wives of deacons. For a fuller discussion of this topic, see *Appendix D: Deacons and Deaconesses?*

However one feels about the matter personally, it should be noted that the issue of ordaining women in Baptist life is a local church matter. As of September 1993, the Executive Committee of the SBC reaffirmed this point once again. The *Baptist and Reflector* reports that during a scheduled meeting the Committee, "Also adopted without opposition . . . stances refusing to use the SBC constitution as a means to challenge churches that ordain women . . ." ⁸⁶ Though much has been made of this issue in recent years, it appears that the practice of ordaining women has not been widely accepted among Southern Baptist churches. According to survey results, only 5.4% of the

⁸⁶ *Baptist and Reflector* 159 (September 29, 1993): 1.

churches would ordain a woman as deacon and only 1.1% would ordain a woman as pastor. Therefore, though more churches may ordain women to either position in the future, it appears that most SBC churches have withstood the strong social pressures prevalent in contemporary America.

Recognizing this verse applies to deacons' wives, it then shows the critical role the wife is to have in working with and supporting her husband in this godly ministry. The compatibility of the wife is especially important, as one of the main tasks of these servants is to visit in homes. Appropriately wives should attend visits to most widows and women. Thus, as Tolbert notes,

It seems very plausible to interpret this passage in the light of the fact that deacon's wives who made pastoral visits with their husbands would easily fall prey to the temptations to gossip and over-indulgence in drink and would, therefore, need to be warned against these.⁸⁷

The Qualifications of the Deacons' Wives

That the wife is a necessary partner is shown by the specific list of qualifications given specifically for her. The first is that she, like her husband (v. 8), is to be "reverent" (*semnos*). The word is defined as "honorable, of good character, worthy of respect" and is used to describe "that which in a human being calls forth veneration and respect from others."⁸⁸ MacArthur says, "People should hold them in awe because of their spiritual

⁸⁷ Trentham, 45.

⁸⁸ *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, Currently available only in electronic form (Copyright by Timothy and Barbara Friberg, 1994), s. v. "*semnos*." (Cited hereafter as *ANLEX*.) *ANLEX* material is taken from *BibleWorks for Windows*, version 3.0 (Big Fork, MT.: Hermeneutika; Copyright by Michael S. Bushell, 1992-1995).

devotion.”⁸⁹ Also, she is not to be a “slanderer.” This word in the Greek is (*diabolos*) and is used thirty-five times in the New Testament as one of the titles for “the devil.”⁹⁰ The gender of this adjective is feminine, probably leading Robertson to speak of “she-devils.”⁹¹ It means to “falsely accuse” and was an admonition for the wives not to be “malicious talkers.”⁹² Again, confidentiality is imperative when called for. One of Satan’s main jobs is to slander and accuse, and he wants to use anyone he can to be his accomplice. May the deacon’s wife never have on her tombstone that which is found on one slate slab in an old English graveyard:

Beneath This Stone, a Lump of Clay,
Lies Arabella Young,
Who, on the Twenty-fourth of May,
Began to Hold Her Tongue.⁹³

Although this epitaph is humorous, the seriousness behind it should not be ignored. What is said of someone else may be forgotten in a moment--except by the one about whom it was said. A small remark, made and then forgotten, may be crippling to the health of the one who remembers it for a lifetime.

To be “temperate” (*nephalios*) originated from the idea “not mixed with wine” and

⁸⁹ MacArthur, 130.

⁹⁰ Earle, 369, n. 11.

⁹¹ A. T. Robertson, “1 Timothy,” *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 vols. ([Nashville]: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1931; Nashville: Broadman Press, n. d.), 575.; See also Ironside, 81.

⁹² Earle, 368.

⁹³ The author found this quote in an old sermon outline. Unfortunately, the source was not documented and is presently unknown.

later came to mean “temperate” or “sober.”⁹⁴ The root word from which it comes means to “be free from every form of mental and spiritual ‘drunkenness’” and “from excess, passion, rashness, confusion, etc.,” thus indicating one should be “well-balanced,” “self-controlled,” while exercising “reasonableness.”⁹⁵ This word is used elsewhere to indicate one who is “self-possessed under all circumstances” (i.e., 1 Peter 1:13-16; 1 Thessalonians 5:5-8).⁹⁶ These qualities are part of being “faithful in all things.” Moffatt translates it “absolutely trustworthy,” which, according to Donald Guthrie is “an exacting yet necessary demand.”⁹⁷ As Ralph Earle states, “Church workers must not be lax in taking care of their assigned duties.”⁹⁸ A wife, fulfilling Scriptural requirements, will be a blessing to her husband.

The Deacon Himself

The Deacon's Relationship with His Wife

Numerous suggestions have been made concerning the qualification “husband of one wife.” It literally rendered means “a one woman kind of man.” The following is a list of the more popular interpretations: (1) a deacon must be celibate, (2) a deacon must be married, (3) a deacon must not be a bigamist or polygamist, (4) a deacon can only have

⁹⁴ Earle, 364.

⁹⁵ *BAGD*, 538.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*.

⁹⁷ Guthrie, 85.

⁹⁸ Earle, 368.

one wife in a lifetime, (5) a deacon's present quality of marriage must be healthy, and (6) the deacon should have only one living wife.⁹⁹

The first view, which advocates celibacy, can be dismissed because of the general teaching of God's blessing on the family (Genesis 1:27-28; 2:20-25) and because of the admonitions for deacons to manage their own children and homes well (1 Timothy 3:12). The second view, requiring that a deacon must be married may also be discounted. The admonition is that he have *one* wife, not *a* wife. Likewise, Paul was probably not married during the later years of his ministry as an apostle (1 Corinthians 7:7-8).

The third view, prohibiting bigamy or polygamy, can also be discounted on the grounds that neither were evidently a problem within the Christian community. There are certainly principles in the New Testament that would prohibit bigamy or polygamy, but nowhere in the New Testament did a church receive a rebuke for this sin. Therefore, it was never a problem in the Christian church. The practice of either of these sexual sins by any member of the church would have been considered unthinkable, and even the suggestion of a possible leader being involved in such a pagan practice would have been abhorrent. Although polygamy was practiced by some Jews, it was illegal in Roman society and likely not that popular in Jewish culture. Even the Corinthian church did not have to be rebuked for this sexual sin. Further, and more convincingly, the admonition in 1 Timothy 5:9 concerning admission to the widows' list carries the similar qualification for

⁹⁹ These six views were presented in written outline form, entitled "What Does 'One-Woman Man' Mean?" during an interview with Dr. George Davis, Vice-President for Academic Affairs at The Criswell College, Dallas, Texas, interview by author, 3 August 1995, tape recorded, The Criswell College, Dallas, Texas.

the women (“has been the wife of one man”). Though polygamy may have been practiced by some men, certainly this was not a major problem among the women of the day.

The fourth suggestion, that a deacon never remarry, even if widowed, is also less than adequate when compared to Scripture. However, this teaching was popular among commentators around the turn of the century.¹⁰⁰ The teachings of the Apostle Paul, nonetheless, consider the marriage of a widow or widower to be perfectly lawful and never questioned on moral grounds (Romans 7:3; 1 Corinthians 7:39).

The fifth interpretation, advocating the present quality of life, can likewise be dismissed. It is often argued that those who have had a pre-conversion divorce or a lawful divorce due to the immorality of the spouse or desertion by an unbeliever (Matthew 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:15) are forgiven. However, the issue is not one of being forgiven, but one of being qualified. For instance, a personal acquaintance of the writer’s is now forgiven for attempting suicide, but the damage caused by the gunshot has still left him partially debilitated. Similarly, Scripture is clear that divorce is not the unpardonable sin and can be forgiven in the Lord. But this does not mean that one who has been divorced is qualified. The same qualification is given for those being put on the widow’s list (“has been the wife of one man”) in 1 Timothy 5:9, indicating that this cannot mean a “present quality of life.” Those who have had to suffer through the agony of a hurtful divorce need to know they

¹⁰⁰ Alfred Plummer, “The Apostle’s Rule Respecting Second Marriages; Its Meaning and Present Obligation,” chapter 11 in *The Pastoral Epistles*, in *The Expositor’s Bible*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, 25 vols. (New York [and] Lafayette Place: Funk & Wagnalls Co., 1900), [?]:118-129. He states (122) that: “The belief that St. Paul was opposed to the ordination of persons who had contracted a second marriage is reasonable in itself. A second marriage, although perfectly lawful and in some cases advisable, was so far a sign of weakness; and a double family would in many cases be a serious hinderance to work.”

are forgiven and useful to God's kingdom. Simply stated, anyone who has been divorced, and is presently a faithful servant of God, may be asked to serve in any capacity in the church, but should not be ordained as a pastor or deacon. This restriction should not present a problem for the true servant, however, because ministry opportunities abound for anyone who wants to serve Him.

It is best, then, to understand the qualification in terms of the sixth interpretation. Thus, it means that a deacon is to have been married only one time, unless a previous marriage was ended by the death of the spouse. This standard being true, it would no doubt apply to his wife as well. Wuest translates it as being a "one wife sort of husband(s)" and comments "that is, married only once."¹⁰¹ Likewise, this accords with the principle put forth in the Old Testament for the priest (Leviticus 21:1, 7).

The church should be gentle and loving when dealing with persons who have experienced divorce. Though more churches are now ordaining those divorced (about 20% will ordain a deacon and 4.9% will ordain a pastor), it is still a sensitive issue. Also, the same qualification holds true for both the pastor (1 Timothy 3:2) and the deacon (1 Timothy 3:12). If a church permits the ordination of a divorced person to the diaconate, then there is no justification for denying a divorced person ordination to the pastorate. Therefore, no grounds exist for the discrepancy in percentages as indicated by the survey.

The Deacon's Relationship with His Children

The qualifications given in verse 12 show that "domestic orderliness and parental

¹⁰¹ Wuest, 61.

control are necessary.”¹⁰² The word “ruling” (*proistemi*) means “to be at the head of, rule, direct . . . manage, (and/or) conduct.”¹⁰³ The historical use of the word involved the “task of guarding and responsibility for and protection of those over whom one is placed” with the intended meanings of “support, care for, and even concern oneself with.”¹⁰⁴ This directive for ruling is similar to the one given the bishop (1 Timothy 3:4) in that both are to rule their “children” and “houses” well. It is dissimilar, however, in that no mention is made of deacons ruling in the church; overseeing in the church is given to the bishop, who is to rule both his “house” and the “church of God” (1 Timothy 3:5). Tolbert believes these distinct qualifications for the bishop and deacons were given for a specific reason:

In their leadership of their family and its affairs, bishops prove their competence to be overseers of God’s household. The main idea with regard to deacons seems to be their standing in the Christian community. If their family life is good, they will enjoy the respect of their fellow Christians.¹⁰⁵

Thus, if the deacon is to be a positive influence in his church and community, he must give firm, loving direction to his home.

The deacon must be especially careful to love his wife above all else in the world (Ephesians 5:25-33). The admonition in being the husband of one wife also carries the idea that he is to be devoted to *his* wife and *his* wife alone. As the spiritual leader in the

¹⁰² Guthrie, 85.

¹⁰³ BAGD, 707.

¹⁰⁴ Lothar Coenen, “Bishop,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, gen. ed. Colin Brown, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Corp., 1975), 1:193.

¹⁰⁵ Tolbert, 112.

home, he is to care for and nourish his wife. God's ideal for marriage consists of a couple who are partners together serving God.

A deacon must also love his children (Ephesians 6:1-4; Deuteronomy 6:4-9). The positive effect of a godly father upon his children cannot be overestimated. He is to teach and influence his children by word and example, avoiding harsh criticism. No one or no institution can replace him, not the public school or the Christian school. It is the father's responsibility to nourish and admonish his children in the Lord. Ron Hawkins has made a timely observation when he writes,

More than Christian schools, America needs Christian fathers. The Old Testament closes with a clear emphasis on the family and the importance of the father. Malachi prophesies that when Jesus comes He will turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers (Malachi 4:6). In this last verse of the Old Testament the emphasis is placed on the reality of God's curse upon that land where fathers do not have a heart for their children.¹⁰⁶

A good family life may be the most tremendous testimony a man can have for Christ and His kingdom.

The Deacons' Reward

For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

1 Timothy 3:13

The reward promised a deacon is promised not based on holding office, but rather on engaging in ministry. Deacon (*diakonos*) means "servant" and servants are those who serve. Verse 10 says, "*let these also first be tested,*" prior to their being set aside as

¹⁰⁶ Ronald E. Hawkins, "Home Influence: Key to Education," *Fundamentalist Journal* 2 (September 1983): 21.

deacons. They should, therefore, already be serving. Then, verse 13 says, “those *who have served well*” obtain good things. Thus, deacons are to continue serving, with good things following as a reward. If a deacon is not involved in ministry, then he really is not a deacon--he only holds an office to which he brings shame.

The word “obtain” (*peripoiew*), means “acquire, obtain, [or] gain for oneself.”¹⁰⁷ “Standing” (*bathmos*) suggests the thought of a “vantage ground.”¹⁰⁸ It may be said that “they are put on a pedestal . . .,” because “those who serve in humility will be exalted by God (James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6) and by the church (1 Thess. 5:12-13).”¹⁰⁹ The present tense indicates that with every day of service, because of their hard work and dedication to the Lord, the deacon is gaining an “excellent” or “good” standing and a great “boldness” or “assurance.”¹¹⁰ These descriptions relate to the great respect he will daily obtain in the eyes of the church and of God.¹¹¹ As one writer has commented, “Influence is a by-product of character.”¹¹² MacArthur says, “Successful service breeds confidence and assurance among the people served. Those who serve God well and see His power and grace operative in their lives will be emboldened for even greater service.”¹¹³ That this is

¹⁰⁷ BAGD, 650.

¹⁰⁸ James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament: Illustrated From the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources*, one vol. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1930), 101.

¹⁰⁹ MacArthur, 131.

¹¹⁰ Earle, 368-69.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² E. K. Simpson, *The Pastoral Epistles*, n. p., 1954, as cited by Guthrie, 86.

true is seen by the comments of several survey respondents from the local church. One said of the deacons in his church, "They are good, committed, hard working men."

Another lady responded, "Our deacons are doing the job of a deacon . . . they do a good job at outreach and visiting." No doubt those that serve will be respected.

Not only will their personal qualities be enhanced, but there will be tremendous ramifications for good in God's kingdom (Acts 6:7). Trentham says,

The higher the deacon, or any other Christian, moves on the ladder of spiritual living the greater confidence he has in sharing his faith. He is to confidently proclaim through word and deed the liberating grace of God until his soul glows with the reality of it.¹¹⁴

The deacon who witnesses for Christ, even in the presence of imminent danger, will have a good standing before God. Again, as Trentham says,

When Deacon Stephen died, he saw Christ standing! Do you see the symbolism? Christ is commonly depicted as sitting at the right hand of the Father . . . But Stephen saw him standing. The implication is that Christ could not sit still and see a deacon stoned. He rose to vindicate him, to go forth to meet him, and to receive him into the courts of his presence forever.¹¹⁵

Though Stephen died under a hail of stones thrown by the world, he was readily accepted by the Father. Thus will be the case of all deacons who faithfully strive to see God's kingdom progress. God bless the man who stands tall in the love of Jesus in the midst of great persecution.

¹¹³ MacArthur, 131.

¹¹⁴ Trentham, 46.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

SECTION II: THE BIBLICAL FUNCTIONS OF A DEACON MINISTRY

CHAPTER 5
BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPING
A WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITHIN THE CHURCH

. . . I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. 1 Timothy 3:15

Introduction

In prior chapters, through a survey of the applicable passages, it was determined that two New Testament church offices exist. Now, it is important to see how these relate to one another and how they function within the larger local church context. But to achieve this task, it will first be necessary to formulate a comprehensive church polity.

A Consideration of Various Church Polities

Church polity is described as “the organization or governmental structure of a local church or fellowship of churches.”¹ There have been various understandings of church polity throughout the history of Christendom, and a brief survey of these should prove helpful. Basically, three major models have emerged, including the episcopal, the

¹ Millard J. Erickson, *Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 130, s.v. “polity.” Cited hereafter as *CDCT*.

presbyterial, and the congregational,² though each has experienced a wide variety of applications. A brief description of each will be given as follows:

Episcopal Church Polity

Under the episcopal system, the recognized officers of the church are the bishops (or overseers), the priests (or presbyters), and the deacons. Final authority for decisions rests with the foremost leaders, the bishops. There is no local church autonomy within this system. This system seeks its biblical support in passages indicating direct apostolic authority (Acts 14:23), or in those passages where direction was given by the apostles' intermediaries (such as Timothy and Titus; cf. Titus 1:5). Further, this method of church organization was defended by Ignatius (circa A. D. 110), thus enjoying the support of at least some early church fathers.³

Firstly, this polity falls short due to its dependence on apostolic succession, as vested in the modern bishop. Conversely, the office of apostle as such does not exist in the church today. Apostolic authority is present, but only through the original apostles' written Word. As Thiessen says,

. . . there are no longer apostles or delegated apostolic authority. What is available today are their instructions concerning church government as contained in Scripture.⁴

² Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, rev. by Vernon D. Doerksen (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1949, 1977; rev. ed. 1979), 321-22.

³ D. A. Carson, "Church, Authority in," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 229.

⁴ Thiessen, 322.

Secondly, a distinction is introduced between bishops and elders creating a dichotomy not found in the New Testament.⁵ Thirdly, episcopal church polity ignores the references to congregational participation (even if it is limited) as found in such Scriptures as Act 6:3, 1 Corinthians 5:4, and 2 Corinthians 8:19.

Presbyterial Church Polity

Recognized officers within this framework include elders (divided into four classes: lay ruler; lay teacher; professional ruler; professional teacher) and deacons. The division of elders is based on such passages as 1 Timothy 5:17 and 1 Corinthians 12:28.⁶ The practice of having multiple elders in every church is based on the use of the plural (*elders*) in passages such as Titus 1:5 and 1 Timothy 5:17. It is believed that this model was adopted by the church from Jewish civil and religious life. The final authority for the local church rests in the board of elders who are selected by the church. Some local church autonomy may exist, but most decisions are made by the elders who attend the following meetings: the session, the presbytery, the synod, and the general assembly.⁷ Scriptural support for the seat of authority residing in the elder board is sought in such examples as the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:6) and the ordination of Timothy (1 Timothy 4:14).

Arguments against this position include the lack of evidence that lay-leaders were

⁵ Carson, 230.

⁶ George W. Knight, III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, eds. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1992), 176.

⁷ Thiessen, 321.

ever considered to be elders. Likewise, there is insufficient evidence for imposing a sharp dichotomy between the dual responsibilities of teaching and ruling among elders. Finally, and similar to the episcopal approach, evidence that the congregation was involved in certain decision making events is mostly ignored, though some participation is normally allowed.

Congregational Church Polity

This model is based on the twin beliefs of Christ being the head of the church (Col. 1:18) and the priesthood of every believer (1 Peter 2:9).⁸ Therefore, each person is free to come directly to Christ for forgiveness of sins, prayer, and guidance. As the individual member is free, so is the local congregation. It is a democratic body with ultimate church authority resting with the whole congregation (Matthew 18:17; Acts 6:3). The recognized officers in this model include pastors and deacons, as indicated by 1 Timothy 3:1, 8 and Philippians 1:1. Leaders are chosen by the people rather than being appointed by denominational or other authorities. There is complete local church autonomy with all cooperation between a local church and another church, board, association, or convention being purely voluntary. Denominational authorities do not have binding authority over any local church.

Biblical support for this model includes passages which show the whole church participating in certain decision making processes (Acts 6:3; 2 Corinthians 8:19-21). Also, church discipline is to be administered by the whole church, not just those in

⁸ Leon Morris, "Church Government," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 240.

positions (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Corinthians 2:6). Similarly, the epistles were addressed to the churches at large, not exclusively to the bishops. Some would even say the teachings of Jesus eliminate any special rank of leader and favor a purely democratic process of government (Matthew 23:8; Luke 22:25-27).⁹

Arguments against this model are derived from the passages presented in favor of the two preceding positions. Firstly, several Scriptures indicate certain matters were handled by the elders (i.e., apostles, pastors, etc.) without congregational approval (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). Secondly, there were numerous directives given by the apostles in the early church that demonstrate their authority carried more weight than mere suggestion. Thirdly, pastors are designated “overseers,” which clearly authenticates a supervisory position. Fourthly, Jesus’ teaching does not eliminate authoritative leadership but indicates what spirit and attitude those holding such positions are to have. Finally, some letters were addressed exclusively to pastors, such as those found in chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation and those addressed to Timothy and Titus. In short, then, a *pure* democracy is not presented as the biblical model for the New Testament church.

Concluding Remarks on Various Models of Church Polity

Based on the above evidence it appears that the congregational model of polity best accords with the whole of Scripture. It allows for both pastoral leadership and congregational involvement. It best represents a balanced approach to the subject of church government as presented in Scripture.

⁹ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, one vol. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983, 1984, 1985), 1081.

Various Issues Within the Framework of Congregational Polity

Though the principles of congregational polity seem to best fit the biblical model, the way a given church implements or utilizes this method can vary greatly. Consequently, sound principles are sometimes overemphasized or applied in non-scriptural ways. For example, some have taken the congregational method to an extreme by pressing for a pure democracy or by placing an unwarranted value on voting and/or the priesthood of the believer. Therefore, a more detailed survey of this method should prove helpful.

Does Congregational Polity Demand A Pure Democracy?

It must be recognized that the New Testament church never operated under a purely democratic rule. For instance, no evidence exists that the early church had everyone show up at a business meeting, randomly make suggestions concerning the direction of the church, and take a formal vote to determine the will of God. Neither is there any precedence for having every aspect of church business brought before the church. Likewise, the dual doctrines of Christ being the head of the Church (which He certainly is) and every believer being a priest (which they certainly are) do not preclude the New Testament directives of the pastors/elders/bishops having certain amounts of authority to lead the church. Attempts to justify such a model of pure democracy as “the” New Testament rule are actually based on the fallacy of elevating a mere implication of Scripture to the position of an explicit doctrine. To accept such a position means one has incorrectly interpreted the New Testament.

It is more probable, however, that the doctrine of pure democracy has been

adopted from traditional church practice rather than a misguided study of the New Testament. It is also unlikely that the majority of persons accepting congregational polity arrived at this conviction through a personal, thorough study of the Scriptures. To substantiate this claim, the writer asked a church in which he served to give the Biblical foundations for “voting” and “business meetings” during a Wednesday evening Bible study. A dry marker board had previously been placed in the front, and the congregation was asked to look up and provide all the passages of Scripture relating to why Baptists “vote.” After a period of silence, and a shuffling of pages, the floor was opened for answers. However, none were given--not one verse or passage of Scripture was shared. When asked if they had been able to find the word “vote” in their concordances, they laughed and said no. It was a fun, but shockingly informative evening.

Apart from an in-depth study of the New Testament, a knowledge of the history of the congregational method of church government would probably help most modern Christians more than anything else. The idea of congregational polity, as received by American churches, originated during the time of the Reformation. This is important to know because circumstances during that particular time clearly show that churches were not violently fighting for individual rights. They were not merely self-willed, self-centered, or rebellious individuals who wanted to quibble over every little detail of church business. Rather, they were reacting to major doctrinal errors and the abhorrent moral behavior which was exemplified by the leadership of the Catholic church. They were speaking out against the *gross and blatant abuses of absolute authority*.

In reality, the Reformation churches had two major problems. Firstly, the priests

were in absolute control. They were even considered to have power over an individual's eternal destiny. This control included the priest's being appointed by other priests and bishops. Thus, leadership was exclusively placed by those in the denomination without regard for the local groups of believers. Secondly, many priests during that period were immoral, corrupt, and godless, leading interpreters of history to believe that many of them were unconverted. The priesthood was considered to be a professional career, not a ministry for those called of God. Within this context, then, those who were truly regenerated and born into the family of God could not in good conscience follow the leadership of such apostates.

When one moves from the Roman Catholic church of sixteenth century Europe to the congregational Baptist churches (and other congregational denominations) in twentieth century America, the circumstances prove to be quite different. The congregational church in America is not facing the same issues that bemoaned her forefathers in Europe. Today the church, being accountable only to God, is responsible for calling her own leaders. Neither is there rampant, wholesale immorality among the clergy. If contemporary pastors were to practice immorality like that alleged of the pre-Reformation priests, a majority of pastors would be rightfully dismissed from their congregations posthaste.

Hence, what the modern church may be suffering could be the opposite of what the churches in the 1500's suffered. That is, rather than being absolutely dominated by the "clergy," the modern church may be too far removed from a willingness to maintain a submissive spirit toward her leaders. This attitude seems to be a widespread phenomenon,

affecting not only the church, but every institution in America. It has been a time of burning flags, shooting teachers and police officers, and many children's rearing of their parents. Even freedom, as conceived by the founding fathers, has been abused. This abuse is evidenced by the emphasis on "me," resulting in unheard of lawsuits, political correctness, and numerous self-centered trends. What the church, much like America, seems to want is absolute freedom without accountability, responsibility, or regard for fellow man.

If this conjecture is true, then the free church has taken a well-intended principle to the point of extremism by misapplication. "Democracy," as often practiced, now mandates that every aspect of church business be decided by the whole (many times with unpleasant bickering), even to the point of effectively negating the sincere leadership of many godly pastors. Much of what happens may be more attuned with the American political structure than the principles contained in the pages of the New Testament, the Constitution of the Body of Christ. Thus, churches utilizing a congregational polity should be cautious not to let this contemporary brand of individualism permeate the church. The doctrine of individualism is much different than the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer.

A demand for pure democracy is not only unbiblical, it is also extremely detrimental to the health of the church. Today it has resulted in many dead, lifeless churches. There is no doubt that this structure will limit growth and stunt spiritual vitality. As Wayne Grudem has noted, a pure democracy simply does not work in the long run:

This view, . . . takes congregational church government to its logical

extreme . . .

In this system everything must come to the congregational meeting. The result is that decisions are often argued endlessly, and, as the church grows, decision making reaches a point of near paralysis. While this structure does attempt to do justice to some of the passages cited above regarding the need for final governing authority to rest with the congregation as a whole, it is unfaithful to the New Testament pattern of recognized and designated elders who have actual authority to rule the church in most situations.¹⁰

The following example may be taken as a case in point:

Recently a church made several small changes concerning the structure of its worship services. These changes were based on a survey of those attending the Sunday morning worship services. However, the changes upset some of the long-time members of the church. The issue was later brought to the church business meeting. There, with an attendance equal to about ten percent of the Sunday morning attendance, an intense debate ensued and the changes were reversed. According to the deacon moderating the business meeting, the initial change had been done “illegally.”

This is only one example of the negative effects of a “pure democracy.”

Everything has to be brought to the formal “business meeting.” Many times these business meetings are dominated by those who have “controlled” the church for a long time or by those with strong and persistent personalities. Their spirits at such meetings may also deter others, especially younger and newer members, from participating. It likewise gives many who are given to a “political” methodology an opportunity to solicit support from friends. In this particular example, the desire of the majority in the church was denied.

To conclude, the idea of pure democracy is simply not biblical. It lacks Scriptural

¹⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House; Copyright Wayne Grudem, 1994), 935-36.

support, having neither command nor example to follow. In many instances, there is outright abuse of the congregational system.

Does the New Testament Example Support "Voting?"

Listing the pitfalls of some aspects of the congregational system of polity, D. A. Carson has said, "Congregationalism tends to read principles of democratic majority vote into NT churches."¹¹ It is the writer's belief that a rethinking needs to take place in Baptist life concerning church polity. That God intended for churches to fight and bicker constantly, especially at business meetings, is not believable. Neither is it biblical to bring every trifling matter to a vote. The concept that the people choose a leader *and* then let the leader lead has been lost.

New Testament Examples of Congregational Participation

When one looks at the biblical evidence, it will become apparent that little "voting" took place in the New Testament church. As a matter of fact, the word "voting" as such is never used. Neither is "voting" ever commanded. The only support given for this idea in the New Testament is the inference suggested by the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer (see below) and about six (possibly seven) examples of congregational participation in the early church. However, none of these examples support the practice of monthly business meetings as customarily conducted in the average Baptist church. At any rate, consider the following seven instances.

¹¹ Carson, 230.

Acts 1:15-26 - Jesus' Followers Replacing Judas

If one interprets this passage in the strictest sense, the selection of Matthias was made prior to Pentecost and thus predated the church. However, its close proximity in time to the church makes it an apt example for how things were done by the earliest followers of Jesus. In this context, Judas' successor needed to be named. This suggestion was requested by one of the *elders*, the Apostle Peter (v. 15; See 1 Peter 5:1). Who submitted the names to be considered and who cast lots (whether it was the congregation, the apostles, or both) is unclear. Clearly, the need was presented to the whole group of disciples because Peter stood in their midst to speak (v. 15). In summary, this major event was initiated and conducted by an elder, but given consideration by the whole church.

Acts 6:1-7 - Choosing the New Deacons

Once again the apostles brought a recommendation before the church (v. 2), explained the situation, and gave directives to the people to choose seven men (vv. 2-3). They also set guidelines by which they were to be chosen (v. 3) and affirmed they would "appoint" these men when the selection was finished (v. 3). The apostles shared with the church their hope of returning, once these men were appointed, to the primary task of the "ministry of the word" (v. 4). These major recommendations were then gladly accepted by the congregation (v. 5). The church chose seven men, whom the apostles prayed for and laid hands on (v. 6). In conclusion, this again was a major decision, recommended, directed, and concluded by the elders, but ratified by the congregation.

Acts 13:1-3; 14:27 - Sending Out Missionaries

In this context, it is the prophets and teachers (i.e., elders) who are praying and are led by the Spirit to set aside Paul and Barnabas for a missionary task (13:1-3). Though it is not stated, there is little doubt that the church prayed for these men because, upon their return, the whole church was called together for the exciting news of what God had been doing (14:27). This was a major event in the life of the church, initiated by the elders, and participated in by the congregation.

Acts 14:23 - Appointing Elders in the Church

In this verse, Paul and Barnabas (as indicated by the larger context of 13:1-14:28) “appointed” elders in every church. Although some have argued that “appointed” can mean “a showing of hands,” thus indicating a vote was taken, such an interpretation does not fit the context. The antecedent of the personal pronoun “they” is clearly the two elders, Paul and Barnabas, not the congregation. Consequently, though the word “appoint,” as noted by Robertson, may be used to indicate either appointment after approval or appointment without approval,¹² it is likely the latter meaning is intended in this particular passage. Lohse agrees and notes that “the reference is not to election by the congregation.”¹³

¹² A. T. Robertson, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 vols. ([Nashville]: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1930; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, n. d.), 216-17.

¹³ Eduard Lohse, “*χείρ*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, trans. and ed. by G. W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1964-76), 9 (1974): 437.

This action does not preclude the possibility of the church's input, a situation which would prove to be highly unlikely. No doubt, Paul and Barnabas would want the wisdom and judgement of the church concerning the faithfulness and moral standing of the men appointed. It does, however, show that the elders were responsible for orchestrating and overseeing this process, even to the point of excluding a formal, popular vote. It probably was a situation that included a spiritually minded consensus. In any event, it should be noted that the church did not instigate the "appointment" of these men, nor did they try to override the decision of their elders.

In summary, the elders were responsible for initiating the appointment of these new pastors in their respective churches. Though no official approval of this major event is evident in this situation, no doubt it was conducted in goodwill and in cooperation with the congregations involved.

Acts 15:1-41 - A Doctrinal Dispute and The Jerusalem Council

This chapter deals with a strong doctrinal dispute in Antioch brought about by the teaching of several Jews from Judea. These men taught that it was necessary to keep the Mosaic law in order to be saved (v. 1). The first ones to confront these men concerning this doctrinal error were the elders, Paul and Barnabas (v. 2). The church as a whole evidently decided that Paul and Barnabas should go to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem to have the "whole" church involved (vv. 2, 3). When they arrived in Jerusalem, the church, the apostles, and the elders received them (v. 4).

The dispute continued at Jerusalem (v. 5), so the apostles and elders met to discuss

this matter (v. 6). At this time another elder, Apostle Peter, (evidently) spoke to the whole church (vv. 7-11), followed by a speech from the elders, Apostle Paul and Pastor/Teacher Barnabas (v. 12), with discussion concluded by a homily from the elder, Pastor James (vv. 21). In response to these speeches, and in line with Pastor James' judgement, the apostles, elders, and the whole church sent the Prophets, Judas and Silas (vv. 22 and 32), along with Apostle Paul and Pastor/Teacher Barnabas back to Antioch with a letter (v. 22). The letter (vv. 23-29) was from the apostles, elders (probably other local pastors) and brethren to the brethren of the Gentile churches (v. 23). When the elders reached Antioch, the church was assembled and the letter was presented to the group. This brought the church great joy (vv. 30-31).

The brethren at Antioch sent greetings back to the apostles at Jerusalem by way of a few elders (v. 33), while other elders remained with them to teach and preach (vv. 32-35). Paul and Barnabas went their separate ways (36-39). Paul chose Silas to go with him because Silas had a good name among the church (vv. 40-41).

In conclusion, several things may be noted. Firstly, there was a major doctrinal issue that needed to be brought before the church. Secondly, the deliberations were handled at the direction and oversight of the elders involved. Thirdly, the whole church was intimately involved, but lay persons did not direct, speak, or recommend to the church. The elders no doubt mixed among the people, gaining their insight and wisdom, but the elders were responsible for formulating and presenting the issue to the church. Thus, there was harmony and cooperation, even in the midst of a potentially devastating problem.

2 Corinthians 8:18-21 and 1 Corinthians 16:1-3 - A Witness for the Journey

In 2 Corinthians, it is evident that the churches chose a man to travel with Paul and the others who were responsible for delivering the large love offering that had been gathered for the Jerusalem church (2 Corinthians 8:19). This traveling arrangement helped remove any doubt about dishonesty and ensured honor both in the eyes of God and man (2 Corinthians 8:20-21). The directive for choosing Paul's companion, however, was given by Paul himself in his previous letter to the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 16:1-3). To conclude, this situation again shows that direction was given to the church through an elder, but also called for congregational participation.

Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5 - The Church Holding Its Members Accountable

Added to these clear examples are the admonitions of both Jesus and Paul for the church to maintain loving discipline among its members. Jesus instructed that one who has erred should first be confronted personally, then with two or three witness, and finally, if no repentance was shown, he was to be brought before the whole church. If he still showed no evidence of repentance, he was to be put out of the church and treated as an unbeliever (Matthew 18:15-20). Thus, there is a clear admonition that the whole church should be involved in the process of disciplining wayward brothers.

Following this advice, Paul tells the Corinthians to put an immoral man, who was living in open incest, out of the church (1 Corinthians 5:1-13). He tells them to do this when they are "gathered together" (v. 4). He later says, "put away from yourselves the evil person" (v. 13). Thus, Paul is calling upon the corporate church to take action against

this man and against all professing brothers who are living in sin.

It is also clear by this example that an elder initiated the action that needed to be brought before the church. It is the personal responsibility of each member to lovingly discipline himself and others in the church, but if no repentance is found with an erring brother, he is to then be brought before the church. It is at this point of bringing the matter before the church, if not before, that a pastor should be involved in the process (Titus 3:10-11; this is written to a pastor, not the church as a whole). At one point, Paul even practiced banning two men from the church by his own accord (1 Timothy 1:18-20).

In summary, it is clear that the whole church is to participate in discipling its members--first individually, then in small groups, but ultimately by the whole church. Though this may be initiated by a pastor, it may ultimately require the participation of the whole church. Those who served as elders were especially involved in the latter stage of the process.

Principles Drawn from These Examples

Three Observations

Several principles may be gleaned from these seven examples of congregational participation in the New Testament. Firstly, only major issues were brought before the church for consideration. These included such events as filling major leadership positions, including the church's pastor and missionaries. It also included selecting proven leaders for sensitive missions concerning major doctrinal disputes or the handling large sums of money. Though the early churches considered business and spiritual matters as a whole, it

is interesting to note the infrequency of such meetings as recorded in the New Testament. In a history that covers approximately a fifty year span, only six (possibly seven) congregational “decisions” are witnessed. Whatever the interpretation, there was no formal, monthly quibbling over petty issues. Neither were these meetings merely consumed with the complaints of the disgruntled “expressing their feelings” or “fighting for their rights.”

Secondly, the elders always initiated, directed, and concluded specially called meetings relating to major issues in the church. Similarly, every church “business” proposal recorded in the New Testament was presented to the corporate group of believers by an elder. There is never an example of a layperson presenting anything to the church body. This point is not made to be purposefully contentious, it is merely a factual observation based on the information contained in the New Testament. Finally, there is never an example of a negative vote. Rather, the congregation affirmed or ratified the godly suggestions of their pastors.

It may be surmised then that business brought before the church body should be presented by the pastor(s). This would prevent a “spontaneous combustion” style of business meeting, and foster a pastor-led meeting conducive to congregational participation. Accordingly, it should be considered a violation of the New Testament example for anyone to bring an issue before the church that has not been thoroughly discussed with the pastor. Further, it appears that any person attempting to gain approval of an issue during a church business session, knowing that it is being done in opposition to the pastor’s discretion, is exemplifying a willfully rebellious spirit. Though such an action

may be allowed by his church's constitution or *Robert's Rules of Order*, it is a specific violation of New Testament precedence. In this scenario, one man is attempting to lead the church when another has been assigned that job by Christ.

To conclude this point, when a church conducts all its business by open forum and majority vote, it is doing so without biblical precedence. Also, when the church is led by voting that contradicts the known direction offered the church by its pastor(s), the church is in clear violation of spiritual principles. An exception to this, of course, would be in order if a pastoral recommendation stood in distinct contradiction to Scripture.

Thirdly, it should be noted that the congregation is seen to have had different levels of participation. At times they were closely involved with the whole process (Acts 15), and on two occasions were actually responsible for choosing the leaders to be appointed by the elders (Acts 6:5; 2 Corinthians 8:19 with 1 Corinthians 16:3-4). At other times they merely ratified what the elders presented to them (Acts 14:23). On rare occasions, it appears that the elders moved without the consensus of the whole (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Timothy 1:20), and they were, if necessary, even willing to go against the consensus of the congregation (1 Corinthians 4:18-21; 2 Corinthians 10:11; 13:2, 10; 3 John 1:9-10).

Options Within Congregational Polity: Whose Supposed to Lead?

There are two major ways that a church can function within the framework of a congregational polity. Firstly, the congregation can be led by everyone with the pastor merely serving as a facilitator. Or, secondly, the church can be led by the pastor in cooperation with the people. In each instance, both the congregation and the pastor are

participating but in different ways and by varying degrees. The difference occurs at the point of emphasis--who among the group is going to provide the primary leadership.

The first system, having the church lead itself, has proven to be dysfunctional and does not enjoy biblical support. However, this is the system of many Southern Baptist churches. The second option, a pastor-led church with congregational participation is supported by the direct teaching of the New Testament (Acts 20:17, 28) and by the example of the early church (as shown in the above examples). It also has proven to be a highly motivating and effective way for churches to function.

The Scriptural method is to allow those called and gifted to be elders in the church to lead the church. Though the church has a say in who is selected as their pastor, they are calling a leader and must let him lead once he is on the field. The Bible never presents a church-led church but always a shepherd-led church. This has been true from the beginning of the church. For instance, the apostles, who were elders, led in the early church. When the apostles moved from the scene, other elders, gifted as pastors, were given the primary place of leadership in the church. These pastors, like the church as a whole, were still under apostolic authority, as provided in the Word of God.

What was true in the beginning is still true today. Because apostles are no longer functioning, pastors have been designated as the primary leaders of the church. Pastors, then, have a continuing ministry. Further, pastors and churches are still bound by the authority of apostolic teaching, recognizing the Word of God to be the sole basis of their faith and practice. Thus, pastors, not the congregation itself, are to provide the primary leadership in the church today.

Revisiting the Priesthood of the Believer

Since congregational polity rests heavily on the twin doctrines of Jesus' headship of the church and the priesthood of the believer, it is important to understand the meaning of both doctrines. Firstly, that Jesus is both the Great High Priest and the Head of the Church is undisputable (Hebrews 4:14; Colossians 1:18). However, this doctrine is often misapplied. For instance, on those occasions when the pastor may do something that a particular member dislikes, he is quickly reminded that he is not the "head" of the church. The implication, of course, is that the pastor has forgotten the vital truth that Jesus is the Head of His Church. However, if this doctrine is so important, and it is, then it should be of the utmost concern to know what *He says* about *His church*. Did He give any instructions about how the church was to function till He comes again? Yes, He did. The Bible is unequivocally clear that the pastor has been designated as the earthly shepherd of the flock. He is to be godly in word and deed, setting the proper example for the church to follow. Also, however, he is to be respected, listened to, and even obeyed when providing godly leadership. Christ, as Head of the Church has spoken, and His church is to listen and obey.

Secondly, there is the related doctrine of the priesthood of the believer. In the New Testament, the believer is said to be a priest five different times: 1 Peter 2:5, 9 and Revelation 1:6, 5:10, and 20:6. The verses in Revelation simply refer to believers as having been made priests unto God through the blood of Christ with no special description of what this designation indicated. The two verses in 1 Peter do mention what this designation means for the New Testament believer. 1 Peter 2:5 indicates the believer has

open communion with Christ, having been made a priest “to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” Verse nine reveals the other purpose to be the believer’s responsibility to witness to others of God’s grace. It reads, “that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” This doctrine then ensures tremendous privileges concerning the believer’s communion with Christ but also emphasizes the responsibilities of worshiping Him and witnessing to others.

Apart from these responsibilities, there is at least one other inference or implication about the role of the believer that can be drawn from this doctrine. That is, if every believer has a direct relationship with God, then each believer can be led by God. This particular inference does appear to have validity, and has been most heavily emphasized among congregational churches. A following assumption in these churches is that since each member can be led of God, each member should be able to have input concerning the direction of the church. Hence, business issues are determined by majority vote. When pushed to the extreme, this truth is also misapplied, being interpreted as the undeniable and undergirding truth of a pure democracy. However, this concept is never taught in Scripture.

Contrarily, the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer is never quoted, applied, or directly taught in regard to church polity. This being true, it seems that the elevation of this implied principle to the place of being a primary doctrine of church government is unfortunate. Had this principle been so important in the early church, surely the Holy Spirit would have led one of the biblical writers to at least mention it. Also, when applied

in this way, it tends to contradict many specific Scriptural teachings concerning the role of the pastor in the church.

It should also be noted that those who first preached this doctrine in history did not foresee it being used in such an extreme way. The occasion for the development of this doctrine, as mentioned above, was one that abhorred a godless and vile priesthood, totally unrestrained by the Word of God. In response to this widespread and wholesale abuse, true believers knew they must make a stand. Thus, the doctrine was not formulated to foster individual rights but to emphasize man's great privilege of coming directly to Christ for forgiveness, independent of lost and wayward human intermediaries.

Considering the application of this doctrine in many of today's churches, it appears this original insight has been lost. As Maring and Hudson assert,

Unfortunately, this doctrine has often been misunderstood, for its conventional interpretation is that it means no more than the right of every man to approach God directly. It is true that Christ is our High Priest, and that his priestly work is unique and unrepeatable. We may indeed come to God in prayer and in humble confession of our sins without the intercession of a human advocate, but for that matter people under the Old Covenant could also do that! This interpretation is not what the doctrine of the priesthood of believers was originally intended to stress; it emphasized responsibilities more than rights. The idea of priesthood indicates something done on behalf of another; one cannot be a priest to himself.¹⁴

Again, the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer is one that stresses responsibilities rather than rights. This is especially evident when looking to the Old Testament role of

¹⁴ Norman H. Maring and Winthrop S. Hudson, *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1963), 91, as cited in Paige Patterson, "Authority and the Priesthood of the Believer," in *The Shophar Papers*, vol. 2 (Dallas: Criswell Center for Biblical Studies, 1980), 8.

the priest in an effort to understand its analogous New Testament counterpart.¹⁵

Similarly, Dr. Paige Patterson, president of Southeastern Seminary, has noted,

Martin Luther was the Reformation stalwart who popularized this doctrine as a response to the priesthood of the Roman Curia. Luther rejected the necessity for a continuing formal priesthood, such as the one propagated by Rome, because every believer had direct access to God through Christ. The Anabaptists followed and expounded that emphasis to its logical ecclesiastical conclusions, insisting that the church should be a believer's church. The members of the churches identify themselves through believer's baptism.¹⁶

Thus, the relationship of the doctrine of the *priesthood of the believer* to the church was never meant to be one of guiding business matters, but spiritual matters. It purposed to replace a lost, formal, ritualistic, man-appointed form of priesthood with a *believers'* priesthood. It likewise implied that a person could become a *believer* only by going directly to Christ for salvation, that church membership was to be constituted of *believers* only, and that each member would identify with a local church, not on the basis of infant baptism, but *believer's* baptism. Thus, the doctrine was one that emphasized personal belief over a system of religion; it dealt with spiritual matters, not individual rights or business meetings.

Consequently, though inferences may be drawn from the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer that would support the idea of a congregational form of government, this principle should not be taken too far out of context and should not be applied in non-biblical ways. When this happens, it results in a spiritual dearth.

¹⁵ See Patterson, *Shopfar Papers*, 10-13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

Concluding Remarks on Congregational Church Polity

From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that the early church did not function as a “pure democracy.” It did not practice “voting” at a monthly business meetings, and the priesthood of the believer was never specifically applied to church polity. All of these facts lead to the exclusion of a pure democracy for today’s church. D. A. Carson has said:

In no case were decisions established by mere majority approval; nor were these spheres of authority the exclusive prerogatives of the entire congregation. Apostles appointed elders, and Timothy had hands laid on him both by the apostle Paul and by the presbytery (II Tim. 1:6; I Tim. 4:14). This need not mean such appointment was made without close consultation with the church; but if the authority granted Titus is significant (Titus 1:5), it appears that oversight, especially in the case of fledgling churches, was exercised first by the apostles and then by their appointees.¹⁷

Thus, the priesthood of the believer is never presented in Scripture to advocate what some are using it for today within the congregational system. For instance, one drawback to a pure democracy is the problem of having members participate who are not faithful in their Christian walk. Making reference again to the historic practice of the congregational system, those churches first utilizing it had strong convictions and practices concerning church discipline. Therefore, wayward members were dealt with, rather than given open reign in the church. This oversight may be a common problem among Baptist churches, where any member, whether living for the Lord or not, gets to have an equal say in the direction of the church. With the average American Christian spending less than five minutes a week in personal Bible study, it is hard to believe the majority can actually know the mind of Christ.

¹⁷ Carson, 230.

This crisis has been recognized by author Bill Hull, who states “Any system for church organization that allows the unspiritual and disobedient to dictate is wrong.”¹⁸ It fact, many “members in good standing” are really people who often prove to be “biblically illiterate, self-willed, pugnacious, and have factious spirits.”¹⁹ When the unspiritual deal in spiritual matters, disaster awaits. Hull again recognizes this fallacy when he writes, “Frankly, most congregations are not capable of deciding what is good for their spiritual lives. They are sheep; they need to follow the shepherd.”²⁰

Another drawback to a pure democracy is the attempt to incorporate all the people in every decision of the church--“a recipe for church fights.”²¹ Each time a vote is presented, there is opportunity for a church split, hurt feelings, mean spirits, and potential harm being done to the family of God. Pastor Thomas Hatley mentions the ill-effects of these processes when he states,

Many are greatly disappointed as new believers when they exit from their first business meeting. Some would jokingly say to them, “Well, now you know what church is really like, but don’t be discouraged.” Are the expectations of these new Christians too high or is our system of church government too corrupt? The answer is obvious.²²

¹⁸ Bill Hull, *The Disciple Making Pastor* (Old Tappan, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1988), 37.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 166.

²¹ Ibid., 37.

²² Thomas Eugene Hatley, “Church Polity in Southern Baptist Churches: Its Origins, Strengths, Divergences, and Possible Routes to Full Biblical Congruity” (Unpublished paper, Criswell Center for Biblical Studies, 1984), 35.

Total rule by majority vote also negates the leadership given the church by God through pastors. Margaret Thatcher, no doubt a champion for democracy, has said, “Consensus is the negation of leadership.”²³ This is an organizational truism. Thus, if God has called leaders out of the church for the church, then they should be followed. The attempt to base *everything* on a common vote is neither biblical nor practical.

Further, the priority given to individual rights in a purely democratic form of congregational polity is unscriptural. Doyle Young, former professor at Southwestern Seminary has articulated a frightening, but accurate portrayal of the church. Though it is lengthy, what he says needs to be considered. He states,

In free churches like my own, congregational government is upheld as a (if not *the*) cardinal distinctive of proper church life. The theory is that the Holy Spirit will speak to everyone and thus the majority's wish will be the wish of the Spirit.

But it is not that simple . . . votes are manipulated . . . What happens when the majority are filled with party spirit and competitiveness? Or sin? . . . The majority of a church will not vote to inconvenience themselves. People are sinful and rebellious . . . The majority favor the status quo, the majority are not analytical, and the majority (in my experience) are not deeply spiritual people of God . . .

Furthermore (in my opinion) one will scan the pages of the New Testament in vain for wide evidence of majority control of church matters. There is no account of a congregation deciding by majority vote what the will of God was or what ‘truth’ was. There are, on the other hand, numerous references to the apostles’ meeting to decide doctrine, apostles giving orders, and apostles overseeing congregations and the Church at large.

The American free-church approach has deeper roots in the out-group’s rejection of the establishment’s power (for example, Anabaptists and Baptists), a making sacred of the rights of the individual, and the avowal of American democracy than it has in the New Testament . . .

. . . We must take seriously the gifts of the Spirit, that some have the gift of leadership. We must take seriously the N.T. model that the apostles,

²³ Margaret Thatcher, as quoted in *Readers Digest*, January 1995, 119.

gifted by God to lead, *led*.²⁴

Though this is a shocking observation, it may nonetheless be all too true. Others besides Young have recognized this ravaging individualism. For instance, Patterson has noted,

What may have happened in Baptist life was that we went to seed on concepts such as democracy, church autonomy, and the priesthood of the believer--all of which are concepts that are absolutely biblical . . . I fear that what we have created in our Baptist churches is a fierce individualism that is so autonomous that it is autonomous from the Holy Spirit.²⁵

In conclusion, it might be asked, “Is all this worth the cherished traditions of a pure democracy and rule by majority voting?” The writer thinks not. The idea of a “pure democracy” is a violation of New Testament principle and carries with it the built-in negative results of its own error. Rather than a pure democracy, the biblical model presents a pastor-led church open to congregational participation. According to the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer, all Christians are equal before God. However, it is admitted by all that God has given different people different roles, primarily through spiritual gifting. There are functional differences and a variety of roles given by God through the Spirit to believers for the edification of the whole body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-12; 1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12:1-8; 1 Peter 4:10-11). Thus, all believers are equally loved, saved, and cherished by God, yet all are to function within the body according to their gifts.

²⁴ Doyle L. Young, *New Life For Your Church: A Renewal Handbook for Pastors* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 92-93.

²⁵ Dr. L. Paige Patterson, President, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina, interview by author, 18 July 1995, at Southeastern Seminary, tape recorded.

Biblical Church Officers and Congregational Church Polity

The Role of the Shepherd Within Congregational Church Polity

In the New Testament, the apostles had considerable God-given authority as the writers of Scripture, the protectors of the gospel, and as elders and leaders in the churches (1 Peter 5:1; 2 John 1:1; 3 John 1:1). D. A. Carson has said:

The apostles enjoy a self-conscious authority as God-chosen custodians of the gospel; and if they prefer to exercise their authority with meekness in an effort to win spiritually minded consensus (e.g., I Cor. 5:1-10; II Cor. 10:6; I Pet. 5:1-4), they are also prepared, if need be, to impose their authority without seeking consensus, and even against the consensus (e.g., Acts 5:1-11; I Cor. 4:18-21; II Cor. 10:11; 13:2-3; III John 10).²⁶

The pertinent issue for this discussion, however, is “What is to be done now that the New Testament apostles have ceased to function?” The answer to this is as follows. As there were men in authority among the New Testament church (specifically, elders gifted as apostles), so there were men given special authority to lead in the church after the apostleship ceased (specifically, elders gifted as pastors). Wherefore, being a primary leader in the church is common to both apostles and pastors because both are considered to be *elders*. An elder is someone called out by God to preach, being equipped with one of the spiritual gifts listed in Ephesian 4:11--apostle, prophet, evangelist, or pastor-teacher. Thus, the apostle and pastor are similar in that both are elders, but they are distinct because of their spiritual gifting. One is an elder, gifted as an apostle, while the other is an elder, gifted as a pastor.

This difference in spiritual gifting also distinguished the types of ministries

²⁶ Carson, 228.

common to the apostle and the pastor. Pastors were unlike the apostles in several important respects, especially concerning their realms of authority. Firstly, the apostles were given a unique authority for writing Scripture that was never extended to the pastor. Hence, pastors do not write Scripture, but are bound to preach, teach, and live it. They have no authority to go outside its perimeters. Pastors are to preach and teach God's Word as written by the apostles. Secondly, pastoral authority for leadership is limited to a local church, whereas apostles exercised authority among many congregations.

Another difference in their ministries has to do with the chronological development of each. Though the apostle and pastor co-existed in the earliest church, it is evident that through time the apostles ceased to function. When this transition occurred, the place of primary leadership in the local churches was gradually handed over to the pastors (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5ff). Hence, Paul writes to Timothy and Titus giving them instructions on how to do ministry after he is gone.

To answer the question of who is supposed to provide the primary leadership in the church today, it is still the *elders*. Just as the early church first had elders who were apostles and then pastors, so the contemporary church is to have elders who are pastors. Though the gifting of apostle has ceased as such, the office of elder has not. This office simply is held by those gifted as pastor-teachers. This explains why the terms elder-bishop-pastor are used interchangeably in later New Testament church history (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-3; Titus 1:5-9). Carson clearly states this truth, when he says:

Those who seem consistently to enjoy the greatest authority at the level of the local congregation are the elders, almost certainly the same as those also labeled bishops (or overseers) and pastors (Acts 20:17-28; cf. Eph.

4:11; I Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5, 7; I Pet. 5:1-2).²⁷

Thus, the pastor, as an elder, has been given the responsibility of overseeing in the local church and should be respected in this position. This is by no means a blank check, in that the church has both the primary responsibility of heeding the Scriptures and the related task of disciplining false teachers.²⁸ These two responsibilities, nonetheless, do not free the church to ignore the biblical admonitions regarding submission to her pastors (Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13). To oppose his leadership and to contest him at every turn is mere sin. It shows a lack of grounding in the Word of God and results in unending strife.

At times, the pastor may even have to stand against the majority. Hopefully, this will never happen. By the same token, however, it is not always “Christian” to bow before carnal men for the sake of maintaining “unity,” especially if a clear biblical principle or major doctrine is in question. If such a situation does occur, the pastor should maintain a Christ-like spirit and attitude, but he must stand his ground. Again, Carson has made an apt point when he states the following:

The normal responsibility for and authority of leadership in the NT rests with the bishops-elders-pastors; but if they are interested in pursuing biblical patterns of leadership, they will be concerned to demonstrate observable growth not only in their grasp of truth but also in their lived discipline (I Tim. 4:14-16). They will comprehend that spiritual leadership, far from lording it over others (Matt. 20:25-28), is a balanced combination of oversight (I Tim. 4:11-13; 6:17-19; Titus 3:9-11) and example (I Tim. 4:12; 6:6-11, 17-18; I Pet. 5:1-4) which, far from being antithetical, are mutually reinforcing. By the same token such leaders prefer not to dictate

²⁷ Ibid., 229.

²⁸ Ibid., 230.

terms but to lead the church into spiritually minded consensus.²⁹

The pastor should always pray and seek spiritual unity in every possible case. It is not infrequent, however, that the direct leadership of the undershepherd is completely denied through the democratic process. A small example of this may be demonstrated through an experience of Pastor T.:

Pastor T had been at his church for about three years. It was a church of several hundred. The deacons at this church were "strong" leaders and well respected by the church. They approved most business matters. Pastor T, trying to work with the people, brought the matter of a New Members Class before the deacons for consideration. Pastor T explained the need for such a class: covering the gospel in detail to ensure each person fully understands and has eternal life, helping new members become acquainted with the church, helping them learn some of the history of the church, taking spiritual gift inventories and being provided with the options for ministry in the church, etc. After such explanation, Pastor T asked the deacons to research it themselves. They discussed this as a group for approximately six months. All deacons were in agreement that this was a good recommendation.

In the meantime, however, Mr. Chairman of Deacons had a family member move back to town and join the church. She informed her dad that the church her family attended while living out of town required a New Members Class and that she didn't like it. At the monthly business meeting, when the motion was made to require a New Members Class, Mr. Chairman of Deacons stands to the floor, and to the amazement his pastor and others (who knew nothing of his change of heart), made his speech in opposition to the motion and it was defeated. Six months of work and an important ministry went down the drain--all in the name of "voting."

This type of foolishness can never be justified from the pages of the New Testament. The job of overseeing is shifted to the most influential home-town guy, who many times does not understand Bible doctrine nor church dynamics. Neither have such men been called or gifted by the Holy Spirit to fill the position of overseeing.

²⁹ Ibid.

Distinguishing Between Pastor and Deacon

The first distinction that is to be noted concerning the pastor and deacon, is the difference between preachers and laymen. There is a difference in those who have been called to preach and those who have not. Although the difference is certain, that difference should be carefully noted.

Sometimes this general area of discussion will utilize the terms “laity” and “clergy.” These particular terms have sometimes been rejected. Most of the earlier arguments among Baptist which denied this distinction were, no doubt, due to anti-Catholic sentiment, and thus, a reaction to the idea of their priesthood.³⁰ To be sure, the New Testament is certain in its teaching that no special office of priest exists wherein authority has been delegated to forgive sins. It is equally true, however, that certain persons in the body of Christ have been set apart for special leadership positions. These persons have sometimes been referred to as “clergy.” This does not mean that they have a special access to God that no one else has or that they alone can perform ministry. What it does mean is that they have been set apart to function in a particular way. Thus, it is legitimate for Baptists to recognize that a verifiable distinction does exist.

This argument has been presented by Dale Moody, long-time professor of Southern Seminary. He substantiates this view in the following way:

The *laos* is the whole church, but *kleros* is that portion of the church under the care of a presbyter . . . The New Testament basis for a distinction

³⁰ Henry C. Vedder, *A Short History of the Baptists* (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 30-31.

between laity and clergy is found in 1 Peter (*laos*, 2:10, and *kleros*, 5:3).³¹

This distinction is more clearly recognized in some translations of the Bible than others. Wycliff translated 1 Peter 5:3 using the word clergy: “neither as having lordship in the clergie . . .” The newer translations variously render the word *kleros* as “those allotted to your charge . . .” (ASV, 1901; NASB); “over those entrusted to you . . .” (NKJV, NIV); and “domineering over those in your charge . . .” (RSV, NRSV). It is clear then that the elders being addressed had been assigned a certain group of believers to oversee and shepherd, with at least some distinction being made between the two.

All of this simply is an explanation of what Baptists and others have always recognized. That is, some members of the Body are called to special service as preachers. With this in mind, then, the first distinction between the pastor and the deacon is that of being separated into clergy and laity by virtue of their respective callings. Although deacons have never been considered clergy by congregational churches, the Catholic church started categorizing them as such in the second century when the diaconate became a stepping stone to the priesthood. It was not until the Reformation, in the writings of John Calvin, that the deacon was again properly recognized as a layman. Calvin stressed the priority of their ministry to the sick and needy and to share the gospel.³² Baptists have

³¹ Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1981), 454. Though Professor Moody is quoted in this chapter, the writer does not feel free to recommend this particular work. Moody comes from a heavily neo-orthodox position, advocating many positions neither appreciated nor held by the writer.

³² Howard B. Foshee, *Broadman Church Manual* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1973), 102. Cited hereafter as *BCM*.

always maintained this distinction, and continue to do so today, as indicated by the following:

In the New Testament there are two officers of the church that are set aside in ordination . . . They are the pastor and the deacon . . . They are the preacher and the layman, the pulpit and the pew, the vocational and the avocational, the salaried and the unsalaried, the prophet and the people.³³

The second distinction made is based on priority. That is, in the New Testament, the priority of a local church's having a pastor (or elder) always came before the priority of having deacons. This priority does not mean that deacons were optional, it merely indicates that they were not set aside until the need arose. Consequently, every church in the New Testament had elders serving in them but not all had deacons. This situation is made apparent by considering three different church settings.

Firstly, the church at Jerusalem had apostles long before they called the first deacons (Acts 6:1-7). Secondly, when Paul addressed Titus about the young church at Crete, he only gave directions for ordaining elders (Titus 1:5-9). Evidently, deacons were not needed at this early stage in the church's life. Jimmy Draper, president of the Baptist Sunday School Board, has written:

. . . the churches in Crete evidently had no deacons, as Paul's instructions to Titus did not mention the appointing of deacons. That is probably because the churches were so young and immature that the bishops or pastors were to perform all the functions of both pastors and deacons.³⁴

The third example is given by way of deduction, based on comments made at

³³ W. A. Criswell, *Criswell's Guidebook for Pastors* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1980), 215. Cited hereafter as Criswell, *Guidebook*.

³⁴ James T. Draper, Jr., *Titus: Patterns for Church Living* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Pub., Inc., 1978), 21.

chronologically different times in the life of the church at Ephesus. This has been noted by Thiessen who states, “In the church at Ephesus there were elders (Acts 20:17) . . . Later, the church at Ephesus had both overseers and deacons (1 Tim. 3:1, 8).”³⁵

The Pastor-Deacon Relationship

In the Baptist church, the relationship between the pastor and deacons is one of the most important in the church, yet it is probably the least discussed. Often there is a “holy hush” around the church, and issues are dealt with as they come along. What usually comes along, however, are fights, conflicts, and hurt feelings.

The comments of a church secretary (received by the author in the survey he conducted) provides such an example. To indicate the misunderstanding of the role of the pastor and deacon, she states, “1 Timothy 3:5 indicates that the deacons have *oversight*, even *over* the pastors.” This errant philosophy helps to explain why the deacons had been instrumental in recently firing the pastor. However, to uninformed church members or others outside the immediate fight, the conflict can be interpreted as being the fault of both the pastor and deacons. This truth is indicated by her further statements:

Both the deacons and the pastor should *pray* for *humility* and for sound judgment based on *God's* ways. My observation is that *humility* is urgently needed (especially among pastors!). God did *not* provide for the church to be under the dictatorship of a pastor (POPE?). But *he is entitled* to respect. A humble pastor can *lead without force or power*.

This lady, being a new believer, had undoubtedly been crushed by what had taken place in

³⁵ Thiessen, 318. The reference is made to 1 Timothy because Timothy was pastor at Ephesus when Paul addressed this letter to him. Accordingly, it is deduced that the church started with elders/overseers but now had deacons also (See 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and 8-13).

her church. She is right about the need for humility; however humility can never be attained apart from a deep knowledge of the Word of God. When a church incorporates non-biblical practices into its operating procedures, like the one just mentioned, there is no question that fights will continue, and the kingdom will be damaged. Many of these situations could be prevented by having thorough Bible studies on God-given roles in the church.

Tensions such as these often rise between pastor and deacon when a faulty deacon ministry has been incorporated into a church. This has been such a prevalent phenomenon that a number of authors have noted it in their writings. Sumner Wemp has observed,

Pastors oftentimes find their relationships with deacons less than ideal. Most of the trouble can be traced to wrong philosophies about what deacons are supposed to do.³⁶

And, as one famous Southern Baptist pastor has stated, “Many Southern Baptist churches expect the pastor to ‘lead’ the church but want the deacons ‘run’ the church. This however, is presbyterial polity. And it is true of Baptist churches.” Likewise, Alexander Strauch has commented:

In many churches, deacons act more like corporation executives than ministering servants. In direct contradiction to the explicit teaching of the New Testament and the very meaning of the name deacon, which is “servant” (*diakonos*), deacons have been made the governing officials of the church.

Even more troublesome is the fact that deacons are often placed into a competitive role with the shepherds of the local church. This practice is a

³⁶ C. Sumner Wemp, *The Guide to Practical Pastoring* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1982), 136-37.

proven formula for prolonged church warfare.³⁷

It appears that enough people have experienced this type of conflict that one should realize there cannot be two primary leaders (i.e., a pastor and a chairman of deacons) without creating a competitive situation. However, God has not intended this to be the case. God is a God of order. It is His will that churches work together, and in order to accomplish this, He has given necessary instructions on organization. The biblical evidence does not allow for a deacon-led church. There will be constant problems in a church where this model exists.

For instance, this type of church government will often engender frequent pastoral turnovers. Because in such a case the church is generally allowing their pastors to be treated as hirelings. John Feinberg is correct in saying, "Churches that treat pastors as hirelings can expect a long and frequent line of pastoral changes."³⁸ Perhaps some men purposely do not want their pastor's tenure to be too long. A man once told the writer that when a pastor stays more than five years, he becomes too influential. In any event, the pastor is not a hireling--he is not to act as one and should not be treated as one. If either occurs, it is a sin (Ezekiel 34:1-10; John 10:11-13).

Usually, a Baptist church that has a exorbitant turnover in pastoral leadership has a high degree of authority being administered by a "board of deacons." Needless to say, pastors sometimes have bad attitudes, but this is surely not always the case. Lloyd

³⁷ Alexander Strauch, *The New Testament Deacon: The Church's Minister of Mercy* (Littleton, Colorado: Lewis & Roth Pub., 1992), 9.

³⁸ John Feinberg, "An Undershepherd or a Hireling?," *Fundamentalist Journal* 2 (October 1983):18.

Jacobsen has recognized that pastors are sometimes at fault, but likewise contends,

On the other extreme stands a grimly resolute board chairman who has gathered almost total power. In his zeal to keep the pastor from “getting out of hand,” he has presided over more pastoral changes than Italy’s had prime ministers.³⁹

Another negative indicator usually associated with a deacon-led church is a lack of growth. At present, more than 70% of all SBC churches are stagnant or dying. This is not to say that all of this problem rests on the shoulders of the deacons. However, it may be at least part of the problem. Seemingly, if an average of nine or ten men in every church were on fire for the Lord, it would be hard for a bad pastor to hurt the church. However, if these same nine or ten men are not walking with the Lord, it will be virtually impossible for the godliest pastor to lead the church to grow. No church can survive having untrained and uncalled leaders trying to run it. One Baptist pastor has said it this way:

A deacon-led church will always be a weak, pitiful congregation, floundering before every wind of secular change. God ordained the pastor, the elder, the bishop to be the spiritual leader and ruler of the congregation. Where he is that and truly that and capably that, the church grows in strength and will forever. Where he is not that and where he becomes a hireling of the deacons, the church withers and dies. God in his infinite wisdom set the order and the constitution of his true church. Blessed and happy is the congregation that follows that order in the mind and purpose of heaven.⁴⁰

The corrections needed to help a deacon-led church are many: (1) a biblical organizational structure needs to be implemented; (2) the pastor needs to be accepted as

³⁹ Lloyd Jacobsen, “Who Decides What Deacons Do?” in *Leadership Magazine*, 4, no. 3 (Summer 1983): 67.

⁴⁰ Criswell, *Guidebook*, 217.

the primary leader and not a hireling; (3) he needs to be helped, prayed for, and listened to--not badgered, opposed, and run off; and (4) he needs to lead the deacons, not be controlled by them. That is not to say that a pastor will ever be perfect, but he is to be respected as the pastor. John Feinberg has made a wise observation:

Clearly, God considers the pastor a shepherd and expects him to function better than a hireling. If he acts like a hireling God will punish him. The responsibility of the congregation, though, is to recognize that the pastor is God's undershepherd and treat him as such.⁴¹

Until men of God who have been set apart as deacons help lead their churches to this understanding, the crisis will continue. But, for one to lead in this endeavor, he must have accepted the following truth for himself:

In Baptist churches the pastor is the "ruling elder," and the deacons are subject to the pastor's authority, just as the disciples were subject to Jesus' authority or Timothy was subject to Paul's authority.⁴²

This may be hard to accept and may even sound somewhat nauseating in today's culture. However, acting in obedience to God is always a spiritual blessing. In addition, biblical authority and submission in a God-given relationship are to be exercised in love and respect. It is not a matter of superiority and inferiority, but one of function.

This truth may sound foreign to the modern Christian because little preaching and teaching has been done in this area. As a matter of fact, it has been common in Southern Baptist life to teach just the opposite. For instance, it is not uncommon to read that deacons are not to be supervised by their pastors. As Howard Foshee states, "Both pastor

⁴¹ Feinberg, 17.

⁴² Wemp, *Guide*, 135.

and deacons are elected by the church. Deacons do not supervise the pastor, nor does the pastor supervise the deacons."⁴³ And, in like fashion, Robert Sheffield states,

The pastor and staff are responsible to the church. They report to the congregation on their assigned work and are given direction by the congregation. The pastor and staff do not supervise the deacons. Neither do the deacons supervise the pastor and staff.⁴⁴

The idea that pastors are not to oversee the deacon ministry is clearly unbiblical. The elders/pastors are to oversee the congregation and the deacons. They are to oversee, guide, and direct the church. This is not to say the pastor is not accountable to his church, but neither do the congregation or the deacons give him direction. He leads them, not the other way around. The pastor is told to oversee the church, and this is done without a footnote exempting the deacon ministry.

The following is a statement by long-time Southern Baptist theologian Herschel Hobbs concerning this pastor-deacon relationship:

. . . the office of bishop did rank above that of the deacon. This is suggested in the order in which they are listed in 1 Timothy 3:1, 13--bishops and deacons.

However, through the years, due to no one's particular design, a gradual drift has taken place to the extent that in many churches the order is reversed. The deacons supervise the work of the bishop to see that he does his work properly.

Unfortunately we have come to use the term "Board of Deacons." It is a short step from that to the idea that this group is a "Board of Directors," at times acting without the leadership of the bishop or the authority of the congregation. The results are damaging to the spirit and cooperation of the church family.

⁴³ Howard B. Foshee, *Now That You're a Deacon* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1975), 125. Cited hereafter as Foshee, *Deacon*.

⁴⁴ Robert Sheffield, *The Ministry of Baptist Deacons* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1990), 33. Cited hereafter as Sheffield, *Baptist Deacons*.

If a church chooses to follow such a pattern, it should recognize that it is by tradition--not by New Testament authority.⁴⁵

Whether anyone wants to talk openly about the functional differences between the pastor and deacon, the issue will nonetheless prove to be of vital interest in maintaining harmony in the church. It is nice to imagine that the whole church, being led by the Holy Spirit, would walk together in peace. However, this is seldom the case. As a professor once said, "Men, someone in the church is going to be calling the shots."⁴⁶ In the writer's opinion, this is a reality not easily admitted by most Baptists. But, the average church, running sixty-six in Sunday School, will generally have three to five people actually "calling the shots"--things do not run smoothly without their approval. Deacons usually make up a majority of those groups, while pastors seldom do--often they are outsiders.

However, many people in the church do want pastoral leadership. Their spiritual life is important to them, and they realize that without the proper leadership they will wander aimlessly. Many deacons may also want this type of pastoral leadership as they are anxious to serve the Lord. For instance, one experienced pastor has said:

It has been my experience through the years that without fail the deacons need and desire a real leader, a real pastor. They want the preacher to stand before them and tell them what ought to be done, to present a challenging program to them. They are ready to follow, to work, to build, to go if they have a man of God and a man of vision to lead the way.⁴⁷

Any church that has men, pastors and deacons, who want to work together will be

⁴⁵ Herschel H. Hobbs, "Baptist Beliefs: Bishops and Deacons," in *The Baptist Standard*, the State Paper of the General Baptist Convention of Texas (July 29, 1981): [?]

⁴⁶ Dr. George B. Davis, class lecture, The Criswell College, Spring 1987.

⁴⁷ Criswell, *Guidebook*, 217.

blessed. The pastor can provide leadership, friendship, and companionship for the deacons. The deacons can provide prayers, support, general helps, and a submissive heart towards the pastor. There can be a happy harmony in the ministry of the Lord, as pastor and deacons work together. It cannot be emphasized passionately enough, however, that a biblical philosophy of ministry must undergird this teamwork. Without an open agreement about what rules will be followed, and these being accepted by all involved, there can be no hope in positive ministry being performed.

The Congregation-Deacon Relationship

The Designation of Deacons Among the Congregation

One of the indicators of how a deacon ministry relates to its church is the designated title they assume. Many different terms have been used in Baptist life to define deacons, including just “deacons,” “deacon group,” or “deacon body.”⁴⁸ According to survey results, the most commonly used terms are “deacon body” (39.7%), “deacon ministry” (25.5%), and “deacon board” (17.4%).

The last of these terms, “deacon board,” is a popular, yet unfortunate, designation for the diaconate. Foshee says, “The term crept into Baptist usage and was used rather widely in years past.”⁴⁹ However, though the terms “group,” “body,” or “ministry” may be appropriate, the term “board” is not. According to Webster’s dictionary, “board” means, “a group of administrators.” When this concept is applied to deacons in a Baptist

⁴⁸ Foshee, *Deacon*, 125-26.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 125.

church, it results in wrong philosophies being developed about deacon ministry. The fallacy of using this term is pointed out by Robert Sheffield in his practical description of a Baptist “Board of Deacons”:

What this means is that all the recommendations of the church basically have to come back through them before they go to the church; they basically are the financial managers of the church.⁵⁰

Deacons are not administrators, however, but servants. They may have administrative tasks to perform as servants, but they do not administrate the church. Thus, the term “board” is not appropriate because it indicates deacons are responsible for functions that are not ascribed to them in the New Testament. This word, then, is diametrically opposed to the New Testament definition of a deacon. Fred Powell, in his training booklet for Baptist deacons, states:

While the types of deacon ministry may vary from church to church, the Bible clearly indicates that the deacon “body” should never take the form of a board of directors.⁵¹

In a more colorful way, Dr. W. A. Criswell has pronounced,

The idea of a “board” of deacons is as strange and unknown to the New Testament church as would be a band of Hitlers and Stalins composing the chosen twelve apostles of the Lord. A ruling board is an idea imported from the corporate life of American business. It has no place in a true, New Testament church.⁵²

⁵⁰ Robert Sheffield, National Deacon Ministry Consultant, Church Administration Department, Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, Tennessee, telephone interview by K. Duane Hastings, writer for *SBC Life*, 23 October 1995, tape recording.

⁵¹ Fred Powell, *A Biblical Deacon Ministry for Your Church: Biblical Truth or Baptist Tradition* (Moore, OK.: Communicator Ministries, Inc., 1991), 10.

⁵² Criswell, *Guidebook*, 217.

Certainly then, “board” does not make for an appropriate title. The other designations listed above (i. e., “ministry,” “fellowship”) could be used and would more properly reflect the true nature of the New Testament deacon. Dr. W. A. Criswell, pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, has preferred the term “fellowship.” He explains why this is fitting:

It is far better to refer to “the fellowship of deacons” than to refer to “the board of deacons.” The word fellowship (Greek, *koinonia*) is a beautiful, wonderful New Testament word, translated “communion”; “fellowship.” Let us use it. It is God’s word for His people.⁵³

To conclude, each church is free to choose its own designation, but it is no doubt more suitable to use something other than “board.”

The Function of Deacons Among the Congregation

Although many deacon ministries are not officially designated by their churches as a “board,” it is evident that they function as such. Sheffield says, “Out of 40,000 churches its hard to know how many are still operating like that, but there are thousands.”⁵⁴ This conjecture is also substantiated by the numerous comments of those surveyed.

For instance, one survey respondent put it this way, “Deacons are servants, however, the average deacon sees it as being an administrator.” Another commented, “Deacons are Servants, but they actually function as ‘overseers’ or ‘administrators.’” One Sunday School Director offered the following suggestion for improving his church’s deacon ministry: “Churches need more spiritual examples and fewer spiritual despots and

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Sheffield, interview by Hastings.

dictators.” A WMU director stated, “Some deacons are not willing to add additional space for more growth.” Speaking of her deacons, a church secretary stated, “They have helped split the church.” Others indicated that “church business” and “committee actions” have to be “approved” by their deacons.

All these remarks indicate that many deacon ministries are functioning as boards.

However, this model is contrary to the biblical standard. As Grudem has noted:

In general, the verses on deacons show that they had recognized offices to “serve” the church in various ways. Acts 6:1-6 suggests that they had some administrative responsibilities, but were nevertheless subject to the authority of those who had rule over the entire church.

It is significant that nowhere in the New Testament do deacons have ruling authority over the church as the elders do . . .⁵⁵

In line with this, other Baptists have also asserted,

There is no indication in the Bible that a deacon ever had any place of authority over the preacher, or over the church, or over the building, or over the finances.⁵⁶

And again,

The Bible does not teach that deacons are in charge of churches. This is contrary to Scripture. The pastor (elder/bishop) leads the church, the deacon serves the church, the people are the final seat of authority, but all are controlled by Christ.⁵⁷

As shown above then, deacons are not overseers of the congregation or the

⁵⁵ Grudem, 919-20.

⁵⁶ John R. Rice in “The Sword of the LORD,” (July 23, 1965) as quoted by Charles E. Mainous, *What On Earth is a Deacon?*, rev. (Columbus, Ohio: Fundamental Baptist Pub., 1971, 1985), 22.

⁵⁷ Elmer Towns, *Theology for Today*, 2d. ed. (n. p.; Copyright 1994 by Elmer Towns), 492.

congregation's undershepherd but are accountable to them. As the deacons were chosen by the congregation so are they responsible to the congregation. They are in no way to serve as a board over them or demand to make decisions for them. Deacons have no special authority outside that which is common to every individual member. It is not required that they approve any church action beforehand. They report to the church, not vice versa.

As the deacons do not oversee the church, neither do they oversee the church's committees. As Foshee has directed, "Church committees report to the church in business sessions and do not need approval by the deacons before presentation to the church."⁵⁸ Likewise, his statement concerning the Pulpit Committee is instructive. He says, "Since the church elects the members of the Pastor Selection committee, the committee should report directly to the church."⁵⁹

Consequently, rather than the deacon fellowship spending time performing committee work or trying to supervise committees, it should be their desire to minister to the people of God. Others can care for the operations of the church. As Foshee has noted:

As employed church staffs have enlarged and church program organizations have expanded, churches are again examining the work of the deacon. Church committees are now responsible for much of the church's administrative work, such as budgets, property maintenance, and church personnel matter.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Foshee, *Deacon*, 124.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁶⁰ *BCM*, 103.

So, what is a deacon to do? What is his job description within the church? Elmer Towns has insisted, "Who needs to write a job description for a servant? Basically, a servant or deacon does what needs to be done."⁶¹ Dr. William Bell has suggested, "Instead of having retreats, trying to figure out what exactly they're supposed to do, what they really ought to do is go to the pastor and say, 'How can we help?'"⁶² These comments agree with the advice given in the *Broadman Church Manual*: "... As a servant of Christ, a deacon serves in whatever areas of need a church assigns . . ."⁶³ Dr. Adrian Rogers has concisely summarized this point in the following statement:

I have often said the church is pastor-led, deacon-served, committee-operated, and congregation-approved. There is nothing a deacon may not be asked to do; whatever a deacon is asked to do is the way we define the role of the deacon at Bellvue. He is there as a servant.⁶⁴

By moving away from mere overseeing then the deacon can serve his Lord as the church and its pastors develop needs. As there are many things which can occupy the time of deacons, it should always be remembered that priority demands "the redeemed congregation of God's people are beautifully cared for."⁶⁵ This means ministry to people, not overseeing the church.

⁶¹ Towns, *Theology for Today*, 492.

⁶² Dr. William Bell, Jr, Dean of the Mary C. Crowley College of Christian Faith at Dallas Baptist University, interview by the author, 2 August 1995, at Dallas Baptist University, tape recorded.

⁶³ *BCM*, 101.

⁶⁴ Adrian Rogers in *Growing Churches* (Winter 1996): forthcoming.

⁶⁵ Criswell, *Guidebook*, 225.

The following testimony shared by Deacon Otis Bardwell will serve as a nice summary to this section. He reminds us,

A person is not made a deacon just for the honor, although it is an honor beyond most of the things that can come to a man's life. The deacon is set apart to serve; he is committed to serve God and his fellowman. As a new deacon, you must understand that you have not been elected to an 'official board' to exercise authority in the life of the church. The office of deacon is not an office of authority but one of service. A man who agrees to serve as a deacon in a New Testament church agrees to be an example, to the limit of God's endowment, in all the life of the church. He is to be an example in spirit, love, devotion, and loyalty.⁶⁶

May God bless each man who engenders love within the family of God by his spiritual service.⁶⁷

Concluding Remarks on Biblical Church Officers and Congregational Polity

According to the New Testament, the pastor has been called by God to oversee the church. This being the case, the deacon should respect and support his pastor in this effort. To oppose him in this regard is sin, showing disobedience and a lack of respect toward God. Similarly, the deacon body in a church is not to act as a "board," serving as the church's administrators and directors. This means that the pastoral staff, the committees, and other groups in the church do not answer to the deacons. It means the deacons are accountable to their pastor and their church, not vice versa. Deacons do not

⁶⁶ Foshee, *Deacon*, 13-14, quoting from an article in *The Deacon*, a quarterly publication of the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

⁶⁷ A suggested resource referencing the issues presented in this chapter is Charles Stanley's message, "Strengthening the Church." This audio tape is available through *In Touch Ministries* by calling 1-800-546-0080, or by writing to P. O. Box 7900, Atlanta, Georgia, 30357, and requesting tape number PU043. This message aired 30 August 1996, on WRJZ, Joy 62 A.M., Knoxville, Tennessee.

give permission for things to be done at church. If permission is to be obtained, it is the deacons who seek such approval from their pastor and/or church before acting on their own.

In summary, it should be stated that overseeing is a spiritual appointment, not a promotion based on seniority. It is extended by a sovereign act of God to those men He chooses to set aside as pastors. Respecting His decisions in these matters will foster peace and will allow the church to grow and be fruitful. When deacons attempt to oversee the church, they are out of God's stated will.

CHAPTER 6
BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPING A
PHILOSOPHY OF DEACON MINISTRY

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; *Acts 6:3*

For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.
1 Timothy 3:13

An Introduction

The aim of this chapter will be to establish a new philosophy of deacon ministry based on biblical principles. This will be done in three ways. Firstly, the *need* for a new philosophy of deacon ministry will be presented.

Secondly, basic biblical principles will be discussed that should serve as the basis of every deacon ministry. This section will review the biblical surveys conducted in the previous chapters. Based on this information, biblical principles will be formulated to show what the Bible *teaches* concerning the deacon's function. This section will then include a survey of Acts 6, determining by biblical *example* several general areas in which the first deacons served. Thus, both biblical *teaching* and *example* will provide a

Scriptural framework for developing a philosophy of deacon ministry in the local church.

Thirdly, a few simple guidelines will be shared to show how a new philosophy of deacon ministry can be *implemented* in the local church.

The Need for a New Philosophy of Deacon Ministry

A Modern Day Plague: No Function or Malfunction

The First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Georgia completed an extensive investigation of how deacon ministry was done in Southern Baptist life. This task was launched when they wanted to gain insight for restructuring their own deacon ministry. However, their research led them to make the following assertion:

Sadly to say, but nevertheless true, in the average Baptist church being a deacon doesn't mean a whole lot. Most often it means that you are either popular, that you come to church regularly, or that you are "just a good old boy." Often in these churches either deacons *do not function, or they malfunction* [emphasis added].¹

The author's own research has led him to the same conclusion--most deacon ministries are either *not functioning* or *malfunctioning*. The number one suggestion of survey respondents for improving their deacon ministries was to see their deacons be involved in ministry. The primary complaint registered by the respondents concerning their deacon ministries had to do with their deacons not being involved in ministry. These suggestions and complaints won first place by a wide margin.

That some deacon ministries are *not functioning* is indicated by the comments of

¹ Taken from a letter addressed to prospective candidates for the Deacon Fellowship at FBC, Woodstock, Georgia.

one Sunday School director who said, “We need a new effort--all our deacons are retired from business *and church*. There is a real lack of ministry, care, and concern.” Evidently, based on such comments, many servants are not serving. The lack of commitment is so severe that many deacons do not even attend church services. As one respondent stated, “We need a way to get deacons back in church after they are out of fellowship.” This degree of unfaithfulness stands in sad protest against all the deacon is supposed to be. His calling is one that beckons him to lead the way in worship and ministry. Thank God for the men who are faithful in setting an example of dedication among the saints!

Because of this high-level apathy, many respondents suggested their churches needed more deacons. However, one may question whether such responses accurately assess their needs. Probably not. Rather, they may need to train or replace the existing deacons. But, to have more deacons doing nothing still equals nothing.

While some deacon ministries are not functioning, others are *malfunctioning*. They generally malfunction by trying to serve as a board of administrators. As shown in the survey, there are numerous misconceptions about what deacons are to do.² For instance, while only 7.8% believed the word “deacon” meant “overseer” or “administrator,” 17.4% of the churches refer to their deacon ministry as a “deacon board.” Almost 36% believed a primary job of the deacon was to “oversee and administrate the direction, planning, and finances of the church.” Another 37.4% believed the deacons had equal responsibility with the pastor in leading the church in spiritual and business affairs--

² See *Chapter 10: A Survey of Southern Baptist Churches* for a summary of the survey results and *Appendix F: A Survey of Deacon Ministry in the Local Southern Baptist Church* for the survey questions, answers, and results.

thus, believing they should function in overseeing capacities. Likewise, it is assumed by the author that more churches than indicated actually need their deacons' approval if business matters are to be "passed" without a major fight. At any rate, when deacons are functioning as a "board," they are malfunctioning.

R. Wayne Jones makes this same assumption in the preface of his excellent book on deacon ministry *The Dirty Feet People*. After working for more than twenty years on staff in the local church, he makes the following statement:

I must admit that on a whole I have been more disappointed in deacons than helped by them. Most deacon bodies in churches seem to be in disarray. Deacons seem to be confused about their role and the expectations that the congregation has for them

. . . It is this servant heart that seems to have disappeared from the deacons of many churches. They have assumed a much different role as administrators or business managers. Due to an overemphasis upon this aspect of deacon ministry, many churches have been squeezed into molds that hinder the ability of the church to grow. Forced terminations and the decline in many denominations stem from the unwillingness of deacons to move beyond the business corporation style of ministry that has infected our churches over the past several decades.³

If this is the case in most Baptist churches, what can be done to help change the situation? That is, what is a deacon ministry to do? Several suggestions have been made in response to this question. The following are just a few of the options different churches are utilizing as they organize for more effective service.

³ R. Wayne Jones, "Preface," in *The Dirty Feet People: Developing a Deacon Ministry That Will Grow Your Sunday School, Your Church, and Assimilate Those Whom You Have Reached* (Franklin, TN: Growth Points Pub., 1993), 7. As indicated by the title, this book discusses how a church can utilize their deacon ministry to lead through the Sunday School. Growth Points Ministry can be reached for these and other materials at 1-800-794-6653.

A Modern Day Option: To Be or Not to Be

Burning the Bridges: No More Deacon Ministry

One alternative chosen by some churches has been to discontinue their deacon ministries. Several of these churches have done quite well, as shown in the following examples.

A rural church where Pastor D. serves has grown from seventeen to about one-hundred fifty in Sunday School during his twenty year tenure. They are in the process of building a new auditorium. The decision to not have deacons was partially molded by his experiences prior to pastoring--he served as a deacon in another local church. The following is a summary of his story as a deacon:

After serving one year as a deacon, the other deacons asked me to serve as Chairman. They made a mistake. At my first meeting, I shared my convictions about making some major changes in the way the deacon ministry was functioning. I had discussed "roofing" and "business" till I was sick. I felt it was time to minister to the hurting people of the church. I then gave each of the other deacons the names of several people needing help in their Christian lives. They were to report back at the next meeting.

There were several red faces during the meeting and an obvious tension existed among the group for the next several weeks. Finally, one afternoon the men who had been upset came to my place of business. They admitted that what I had suggested was right. Afterwards, they began to enjoy the new ministry they were performing.

Pastor D. also shared another experience that influenced his thinking about the current state of deacon ministry. He says that early in his ministry one influential Southern Baptist pastor gave him this advice while attending a church conference: "Young man, if you don't have to have deacons, then don't have them. I have had over half my ministry wasted and taken from me by having to deal with unspiritual deacons. If you can pastor a

church that doesn't have deacons, then do it." Pastor D. has done just that, and continues to emphasize *ministry* in the church. The deacon ministry where he previously served as Chairman reverted to its old habit of being a board and the church has suffered.

Another well-known Southern Baptist church, the FBC Springdale, Arkansas, does not have an official deacon ministry. They now average about 3,500 to 3,700 in Sunday School. The transition leading away from the deacon ministry occurred over twenty years ago when Dr. Cliff Palmer served as pastor. At that time, the church basically had a deacon ministry that met monthly to discuss the financial report and other business items. For this reason, he suggested they implement a ministry directed toward the families of the church. He says the men visited regularly for about two months, but then made hardly any visits at all. At a later meeting he apologized for talking them into a ministry they really did not want. Having said that, he suggested there was no need to meet any more on a regular basis. The option was left open for them to start meeting again if their interest in ministry was renewed.⁴

The possibility of not having a deacon ministry was also recommended by one of the survey respondents. He had pastored several churches in the Bible-belt before pastoring in a missionary setting in the States. He shared the following note:

Many times I have believed that some of our churches would be better off without deacons. I have found that most deacons are chosen for their popularity rather than their service. Many are ordained to "become" deacons--I believe the Bible teaches they are to "be" deacons (servants) before they are ordained. They should be ordained because of their example of service.

⁴ Dr. Cliff Palmer, Pastor and Director of Missions, interview by author, [13]? November 1995, telephone conversation, tape recorded.

His experience in the Bible-belt was a nightmare, dominated by deacons functioning according to the traditional “deacon board” model. The deacons with whom he served in the missionary setting were a blessing. They had been taught the Scriptural principles of servant ministry. Therein lies the difference between blessing and curse.

In response, one may ask, “Is it a biblical practice to not have deacons?” To answer, it should be noted that the office of deacon is clearly set forth in the New Testament. However, it should also be noted that the Jerusalem church had at least 20,000 active members before calling their first deacons. And, even with this large membership, they ordained only seven men. Based on that evidence, deacons should only be elected if a specific ministry need calls for them. Otherwise, choosing to not have deacons is a legitimate, biblical possibility.

Bridging the Gap: Practice Based on Biblical Principles

But what if a church feels led to have a deacon ministry? What can a church do to change from the board concept to a biblical concept? Firstly, as mentioned above, it is imperative to have a thorough knowledge of the principles of deacon ministry as given in Scripture. It is only when these principles are understood and utilized in forming a philosophy of ministry that a deacon ministry can be effective. Biblical principles are not the same as practical application, but biblical principles should serve as the basis of all practical application. If biblical principles are not used as a basis, then no hope exists for a ministry to ever function properly.

For instance, if a church accepts as a valid biblical principle that deacons are to be

overseers, their deacon ministry will never rise above being a board of directors. If deacons are thought to be administrators, they will merely control the treasury. However, if it is understood that deacons are servants, the church will be blessed with deacons who perform spiritual ministries. Adopting the principle of servanthood will lead them to minister to people as noted in Scripture, serving widows and caring for the poor.

If principles are accurately derived from the Word of God, they are an expression of God's truth. This being the case, the same New Testament principles should undergird every deacon ministry, forming its foundation and serving as a framework for its organization. But, this is not to say that every deacon ministry must be identical. Though biblical principles will always be the same, they will be variously applied. Each church is unique, and its ministry needs will differ. Consequently, the methodology of each church will depend upon its specific circumstances. In any event, the place for any successful ministry to start is with clear principles derived from the Word of God. When these are recognized and implemented, the deacon can fulfill his God-called ministry with grace. Therefore, the following section will focus on developing specific biblical principles of deacon ministry and how they can be applied.

Developing A New Philosophy of Deacon Ministry

Based on Biblical Principles

Having done a survey of Philippians 1:1, Acts 6:1-7, and 1 Timothy 3:8-13 in previous chapters, it is now appropriate to summarize the findings and formulate the principles necessary to have a biblical deacon ministry. That is, a philosophy of deacon

ministry needs to be developed. The aim of this section will be to identify: (1) two principles, based on biblical *teaching*, necessary for effective deacon ministry, and (2) four generalized areas of ministry, based on biblical *examples*, where these principles can be applied in the local church setting.

Principles Based on Teaching: The Theory of Deacon Ministry

Principle # 1 - An Early Church Perspective: Be a Servant, Not a Boss

A review of the biblical surveys completed in chapters 2, 3, and 4 provide the following evidences. Two offices are generally recognized in Baptist churches--that of deacon and that of pastor/elder/bishop (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1, 8). Acts 6:1-7 is commonly accepted as a prototype of the deacon ministry. The position of deacon then was suggested by the apostles for a specific purpose--meeting practical needs among the people. When the seven accepted responsibility for this ministry, four goals of the church were attained: people's needs were met, conflict was settled, the apostles focused on prayer and preaching, and many were saved (Acts 6:7).

To properly define the role of a deacon within the local church, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of his function and the pastor's function. This can be done primarily by defining the biblical terms. The Greek word for deacon, *diakonos*, is composed of two words--*dia*, meaning "through," and *konos*, meaning "dust." Hence, it literally means "through the dust," suggesting the humble heart of a genuine servant. A. T. Robertson says the infinitive *diakonein* means "to raise a dust in a hurry, to serve, to minister . . ." Accordingly, *diakonos* was the standard designation for a table-waiter. It

was also used to specify a messenger, steward, baker, maid, and courtier or eunuch of a king. Thus, the word is well translated, *servant*.

It is important to distinguish the word deacon (*diakonos*), used for service voluntarily rendered, from the word bondservant (*doulos*), used for denoting the enslavement of one person to another. The deacon is not in bondage to his church or his pastor, but has willingly chosen to be a helpful servant. Though servanthood is often ridiculed by the lost world as demeaning, Jesus Himself became our Suffering Servant, thereby procuring our salvation (Mark 10:45). Thus, Jesus glorified servanthood and demands it of all who will follow Him (John 12:26).

There are three words (elder, bishop, and pastor) used interchangeably in Scripture to designate the office of pastor (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-3). The most common term is elder (*presbuteros*), denoting the honor due a person of wisdom and age. Thus, the position of pastor is to be honored by the church. The second word, bishop (*episkopos*), literally meaning overseer, designates a presiding officer, superintendent, or foreman. The overseer is to govern, lead, and ensure things done by others are done correctly. A third term, pastor (*poimen*), literally means shepherd. The shepherd is to lead, guide, feed, govern, and protect the flock. In secular usage, it designated a chief or prince.

The terminology then denotes pastors as “overseers” and deacons as “servants.” This model is consistently presented throughout the New Testament. For instance, the pastor is not only called an overseer (1 Timothy 3:1; Titus 1:7) but is commanded to oversee (1 Peter 5:2). Further, when considering the practice of the early church, deacons were to wait tables (Acts 6:2) while pastors were to preach the word and oversee the

church (Acts 6:4; 20:28), including the finances (Acts 11:29-30). The primacy of the pastor's function is also suggested by the consistent priority it is given over that of the deacon when the two offices are listed jointly (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1, 8). Finally, the elders appointed and ordained the deacons, not vice versa (Acts 6:3, 6). The laying on of hands is always performed by elders in Scripture, never by deacons, and is symbolic of delegated authority (Acts 6:6; 1 Timothy 4:14; Cf. Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).

Without exception then the New Testament indicates that pastors, not deacons, are charged with administrating the business and spiritual affairs of the church. Deacons are called to be helpers, not overseers. This truth is evident for five reasons: (1) the terms used to designate each office, (2) the command in Scripture for pastors to oversee, (3) the examples set forth in early church practice, (4) the priority of pastors when the offices are listed, and (5) the authority structure indicated by appointment and ordination.

Further, deacons are to be accountable to their church; the church chose them, not vice versa (Acts 6:5). No New Testament example exists where deacons dictated the church's direction or made decisions about its function or welfare. Deacons were not appointed to approve committee reports or church business, but to *serve*. Their service has nothing to do with overseeing, but everything to do with *ministering to people*.

Principle # 2 - An Early Church Precedent: Be Involved in Ministry

As the "office" of deacon is considered, one should remember that it is not a "position" merely to be held, but a "ministry" to be performed. As Richard Longenecker has explained in his commentary on Acts 6,

... the ministry to which the seven were appointed was functionally equivalent to what Paul covered in the title "deacon" (cf. 1 Timothy 3:8-13)--which is but to affirm the maxim that in the NT "ministry was a function long before it became an office."⁵

Thus, the church may not miss the "office" of deacon, but they certainly, beyond doubt, would miss the wonderful ministry provided by those who hold such places of leadership.

In similar fashion, C. E. B. Cranfield has affirmed that the New Testament "affords unambiguous evidence of the perpetual necessity of *diakonia* as a function of the Church on earth."⁶ In the words of William Barclay, "It is extremely interesting to note that the first office-bearers to be appointed were chosen not to talk but for practical service."⁷

Thus, deacon "ministry" will always be needed. Likewise, what McConnell has suggested regarding the office of elder will readily apply to the office of deacon:

As an office, it has its official duties. These should be understood and faithfully performed. No man's desire should be for the office, but for the *work*, the good work which the office gives him an opportunity to do.⁸

These observations are only reminders that the word "deacon" means "servant."

Accordingly, the very essence of the name indicates that the deacon is to be busy doing

⁵ Richard N. Longenecker, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1981), 331.

⁶ C. E. B. Cranfield, "Diakonia in the New Testament," *Service in Christ*, ed. James I. McCord and T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1966), 39.

⁷ William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*, in *The Daily Study Bible Series*, rev. ed., (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1953; sec. ed., 1955; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 52.

⁸ F. M. McConnell, *McConnell's Manual for Baptist Churches* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1926), 86.

ministry. If he adopts this attitude of service, the church will be blessed. For instance, one church secretary commended her church's deacons by saying, "They are available to the pastor, the secretary, and all members of the membership, and they carry forth their duties timely and reverently." May each church have such humble, service-oriented deacons.

Application Based on Example: The Practice of Deacon Ministry

Acts 6 shows that the first deacons ministered in the following four areas: (1) Solving Problems, (2) Caring for People, (3) Serving the Pastors, and (4) Witnessing to the Lost. Their example should serve as a prototype for today's deacons.

Application # 1 - The Ministry of Solving Problems in the Church

Solving Problems Means Dealing With Conflict

Conflict as Presented in Acts 6

As shown above, Acts 6:1 indicates that a "complaint" served as the occasion for the first deacon ministry. Thus, Carl Diemer, Jr. has rightly interpreted that,

The main 'business' of the deacons selected in Acts 6 was to quiet the 'murmuring' in the Jerusalem church. They were commissioned to do what was necessary as servants to meet the needs of the murmurers. Keeping a church united and preventing dissension is the special ministry of a godly deacon.⁹

Howard Foshee offers a similar theory in the *Broadman Church Manual*:

The prototype of today's deacon is found in the Acts 6 account of seven men being appointed by the Jerusalem church to resolve a fellowship

⁹ Carl J. Diemer, Jr., "Deacons and Other Endangered Species," *Fundamentalists Journal* 3 (March 1984): 22.

problem

Christian fellowship was being threatened in the Jerusalem church as the Greek-speaking widows told how they felt they were being mistreated. Seven men were appointed to resolve the potential problem of broken fellowship that was threatening the early church.

The seven were obviously successful in resolving the problem . . .¹⁰

Although it is more convenient to hope that similar things will not occur in the modern church, it is nonetheless naive to acquiesce to such fancy. History continues to prove that problems do occur. Working with people means working with the problems people face and the problems people create.

Conflict as Presented Elsewhere in Scripture

The Bible clearly portrays the numerous conflicts that were inherent among God's people. Such conflicts are apparent in both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, the ministry of Moses serves as an appropriate vignette as he constantly dealt with complaints and other problems. Thus, he responds to the children of Israel in the wilderness by preaching,

This shall be seen when the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening, and in the morning bread to the full; for the Lord hears your complaints which you make against Him. And what are we? Your complaints are not against us but against the Lord (Exodus 16:8; Cf. 16:2, 7, 9, 12).

Not only did Moses contend with complaining, so did Jesus. Scripture informs the reader, "*And there was much complaining among the people concerning Him. Some said, 'He is good'; others said, 'No, on the contrary, He deceives the people'*" (John 7:12). Likewise, Paul realized the potential for murmuring in the church. He wrote to the

¹⁰ Howard B. Foshee, *Broadman Church Manual* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1973), 101. Cited hereafter as Foshee, *BCM*.

believers at Philippi commanding them to “*do all things without complaining and disputing . . .*” (Philippians 2:14). Two women in this same church had to admonished by name for bickering: “*I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord*” (Philippians 4:2). Peter likewise counseled believers to “*be hospitable to one another without grumbling*” (1 Peter 4:9). Even the most spiritual are sometimes given to shortcomings. For instance, Paul and Barnabas had a disagreement about John Mark and parted ways for a time (Acts 15:36-40) though they were later reconciled (Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11). Evidently then, murmuring and complaining are likely to be a problem at any time.

Conflict as Defined by Scripture

The conflict in Acts 6 is defined in the Greek as *goggomous* and carries the meaning of “secret murmurings.” Most conflict, because of its source, will have gossip and secret whisperings associated with it. It is through this gossiping that a legitimate complaint or misunderstanding is blown out of proportion, resulting in severed relationships. But what is the source of this type of conflict and division?

Ultimately, all divisiveness is rooted in sin and can be traced to the Garden of Eden. It was there that man’s rebellion separated him from God. Consequently, the potential for conflict invaded mankind. A murder resulted soon after when Cain slew Abel (Genesis 4:8). Through time, the problem only intensified. Due to mankind’s multiplied violence, God eventually destroyed the earth with a flood (Genesis 6:13). Thus, it is man’s sinfulness that causes the contentions that are a part of this present world.

This truth is also clearly explicated elsewhere in Scripture. For example, sin is identified as the source of conflict in James 3:13-16:

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. {14} But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. {15} This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. {16} For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

In this passage, “*confusion and every evil thing*” are due to “*envy and self-seeking*” which are grounded in “*earthly,*” “*sensual,*” and “*demonic*” influences. That is, conflict is a result of the world, the flesh, and the devil. It has to do with the evil atmosphere of this present world, the sinful nature of each person alive, and the demonic spirits who thrive on breeding contempt and leading mankind into lawlessness.

“*Self-seeking*” in this passage speaks of selfish ambition, rivalry, strife, contention, and power struggles. F. J. A. Hort describes it as “the vice of a leader of a party created for his own pride; it is partly ambition and partly rivalry.”¹¹ This “*self-seeking*” is commonly exemplified by men who are pugnacious and self-willed, generally having little grounding in the Word of God. If they do not get their way, anger develops and the end result is usually “*bitter envy.*” Thus, worldly rather than godly wisdom serves as the foundation of their thinking. It results from having earth-bound motives and being anchored in this world rather than the one to come. Such men, being undisciplined in the faith, have not matured in their Christian life.

¹¹ As cited by R. V. G. Tasker, *The General Epistle of James*, in *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, vol. 16 (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., n. d.; repr. date, 1983), 80.

Those having this same attitude in the Corinthian church were sharply rebuked by the Apostle Paul:

*And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food: for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men.
1 Corinthians 3:1-3*

Thus, Paul says those having such attitudes and actions are acting like lost men. As a matter of fact, Jude describes lost and unsaved apostates in a similar manner:

*These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage . . . mockers . . . who . . . walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit.
Jude 14b-19*

Consequently, such sin should have no place nor power in the Christian's life or in the church. The power of sin has been broken in the believer's life (Romans 6) and God's Word is effective in bringing about sanctification (John 17:17). As Ironside has noted,

If bitter envying and strife are ruling in the heart it indicates an unsubdued will and life out of harmony with God. For this there is no reasonable excuse, for abundant provision has been made in order that one may be freed from such bondage.¹²

Therefore, church leaders are to be careful not to foster and promote gossip and grumbling, but rather address issues up-front, openly, and biblically. This need for caution was recognized by John Bunyan in his famous Christian allegory *Pilgrim's Progress*. There he mentions "the parson of our parish, Mr. Two-Tongues." However, fostering

¹² Henry Allen Ironside, *Lectures on the Books of Hebrews, James, Peter* (Neptune, N. J.: Loizeaux Brothers, 1943), *James*:38.

conflict and promoting gossip is not only unbecoming of the church member and the pastor but also of the deacon and the deacon's wife. Specifically, the Bible warns against the deacon being "double-tongued" (*dilogos*; 1 Timothy 3:8) and the deacon's wife being a "slanderer" (*diabolos*; 1 Timothy 3:11).¹³

The deacon then should guard against several things. When angry, he may have the tendency to color things in a way that would do harm to his enemy. He also may be tempted to skew the facts of a given situation to avoid becoming unpopular. At other times, when settling conflicts, there may be the desire to break confidentiality or repeat that which is harmful or untrue about others. In any case, none of these actions are appropriate for the deacon or his wife.

As the deacon and his wife are in the homes of church members, dealing with many delicate situations, they are always to quiet murmuring and put out fires. The deacon can be one of the most divisive and harmful individuals in the church if slander is a pitfall for him. Since the deacon has gained the people's trust, his influence will make a profound impact for either harmony or contention within his church and community. The following sections relate specific ways the deacon and his wife can help the church solve problems.

Solving Problems by Nurturing Relationships

It is not always wrong or unhealthy to disagree. Legitimate problems are not uncommon and need to be addressed. Often, however, complaining stems from rebellious attitudes driven by the desire to promote self-rights. In response, it may be said that such

¹³ Refer to the comments on *dilogos* and *diabolos* in *Chapter 4: A Survey of 1 Timothy 3:8-13* for further insight concerning these admonitions.

complaining is indicative of those having a “complex” (i.e., having impulses that strongly influence behavior; an obsession). With this in mind, the following sections will consider several negative situations in the Bible created by individuals who had a “complex.” These examples clearly indicate that when a “complex” exists, relationships are broken. The deacon then can help by preventing strife and by mending broken relationships.

By Nurturing Pastor-Church Relationships

The Murmuring Complex

In Acts 6, a number of church members had become upset with the apostles. They felt their widows were being neglected in the church’s ministry. There may have been a legitimate complaint on the part of the widows, but the issue was handled improperly. It was addressed by gossip rather than by going directly to those in charge. Gossip is harmful and will never settle a problem. The first deacons helped reconcile the church to their pastors by ministering to the neglected widows.

The Diotrephes Complex

Another way the pastor-church relationship can be protected is by recognizing and dealing with those who try to usurp authority in the congregation, as exemplified in 3 John. Evidently, Gaius was pastor of the church at hand (v.1) and had been a faithful shepherd (v.3). However, he was apparently prevented from this work by an illness (v.2). John was told about Gaius’ condition and is now responding with a second letter (v.9).

While the pastor was incapacitated, it appears that a power struggle developed in

the church (vv. 9-10). At the root of this problem was a man by the name of Diotrephes (v. 9). He was a stubborn, self-willed man (v. 10), as indicated by the following: [1] he loved to have the “preeminence”--he wanted to run things (v.9); [2] he rejected John’s God-given authority (vv.9-10); [3] he was filled with gossip and slander toward John (v.10); and [4] he rejected Christian missionaries, putting them and those who helped them out of the church (vv.5-8, 10). Also, John had probably already commended another godly man Demetrius to supply leadership during this interim time (v. 12).

Considering all these characteristics, Diotrephes is a prime example of a carnal troublemaker in the church. Such a man does not respect authority and has no burden to reach the lost world. He believes the church must obtain his permission before doing anything. Consequently, the Apostle John had several things to say concerning Diotrephes. First of all, he considered him to be lost (v. 11). Secondly, he would immediately discipline Diotrephes upon arriving at the church (v. 10a). Based on these admonitions, the deacon would not want to follow or support any man who consistently attempts to dominate the church by opposing his pastor.

The Coppersmith Complex

Sometimes conflict occurs when someone outside the church launches an attack against the church and/or the pastor. In such an instance, the Apostle Paul experienced strong opposition from a coppersmith named Alexander. He wrote to Timothy:

{14} Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. {15} You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words. 2 Timothy 4:14-15

Alexander probably opposed Paul because many had been converted under Paul's preaching. As a result, people stopped buying the metal idols formerly required by their pagan religions. Thus, Alexander was affected financially, having his business ruined.

It is possible then for the church and/or pastor to suffer because of those outside the church. If the church has stood against sin, those in the world may launch heavy attacks. Many times the pastor will take the brunt of this opposition. Certain church members may even side with the outsiders against their pastor. If this does happen, the deacon should support both his pastor and his church.

Such an incident recently occurred in a Southern Baptist church that had been experiencing tremendous growth. The pastor resigned after the deacons voted three times for him to leave. They felt their church had lost its good reputation in the community because of his preaching against abortion and other sins. Thus, the deacons opposed their pastor, driving a deep wedge between him and the church. In this case, those deacons should repent of their rebellious attitudes and their lack of courage to stand against sin. What they did is similar to what Paul's companions did in the account just mentioned. He says, "*At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them*" (2 Timothy 4:16). May this type of behavior never be associated with a man who has been set aside to an office in the church of Christ.

The Spy Complex

In Numbers 13 and 14, twelve spies were sent to check out the land of Canaan. This mission was conducted at the direction of Moses who was acting in obedience to the

command of God. However, upon returning, ten of these men led a rebellion in the congregation of Israel. The Bible says,

{31} But the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we." {32} And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out . . . {2} And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron . . .
Numbers 13:31-32a; 14:2a

As a result, the children of Israel "voted" not to follow God's command to enter the Promised Land. Rather, they decided to fire Moses, saying "*Let us select a leader and return to Egypt*" (14:4). The Lord's attitude toward them was judgment, killing the ten spies who caused the conflict (14:36-38). Additionally, He banned the congregation of Israel to forty years of wandering in the desert, one year for each day the spies had spent in the land of Canaan (14:34). He told the adults they would remain in the wilderness until their carcasses should "*fall*" and be "*consumed*" (14:32, 33).

Several lessons can be learned from these examples. Firstly, church business meetings should be considered. It is here that many churches are intimidated or persuaded by carnal men much like the ten spies. Consequently, many churches are missing God's will. The following summary given of the children of Israel would equally apply to them:

The result of hearing the majority report was discouragement, rebellion, and finally God's judgement. Consequently that generation did not enter Canaan but was doomed to die in the wilderness.¹⁴

This same tragedy is still repeating itself today. This is true because those who are most apt to cause trouble often pick the most apt time to do so--the church business meeting. It

¹⁴ Samuel J. Schultz, *Deuteronomy: The Gospel of Love in the Everyman's Bible Commentary Series* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 26.

is the carnal man's opportune and appointed hour for manifesting his contentious nature, battering the church and/or the pastor. This has led Bill Hull to declare,

Some congregations treat suspicion of their leaders' motives and decisions as a treasured corporate value. To follow their leadership without fighting them is considered irresponsible. Historically these congregations challenge all ideas and programs their leaders suggest. Their church business meetings shame the name of Christ. There are bickering, political power plays, and petitions. *Roberts Rules of Order* have more clout than Scripture.¹⁵

Such fiascos are devastating the Church's health and well-being.

Secondly, consideration should be given to how the church and the deacon respond when becoming angry with their pastor. God judged the children of Israel for rebelling against Moses. The Bible says that their complaints against His chosen leadership were really complaints directly against Him (Numbers 14:27; Exodus 16:7-8). This is not to say that the pastor is always right, but that he is not to be opposed at every turn. Biblically, if he is committing specific moral or doctrinal sin, then confrontation is required. In such cases, he is to be confronted one-on-one in a loving, redemptive manner. If further resolve is needed, then two or three others should be brought into the process. If this doesn't work, then he needs to be brought before the church (Matthew 18:15-17). In this latter case, it should be remembered that a pastor is not to be accused except on the testimony of two or three witnesses (1 Timothy 5:19-20).

Most opposition against the pastor, however, is not based on a specific moral lapse or a major doctrinal problem. Generally, it springs from differing ideas about the church's

¹⁵ Bill Hull, *The Disciple Making Pastor* (Old Tappan, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1988), 165-66.

direction. In this case, the deacon or other person has no grounds for leading an opposition party against the pastor. They might let him know how they feel, but it is up to him to decide. Beyond this, it is the church member's first responsibility to pray. No basis exists for firing him, as Israel attempted to do with Moses (Numbers 14:4).

Again, if a member or a deacon simply does not like his pastor, his recourse is to pray. Since God called the man, God is responsible for him. God is able to deal with a rebellious pastor as He is with any other rebellious person. For instance, after judging Israel for rebelling against Moses and Aaron, God later judged both Moses and Aaron for rebelling against Him at the waters of Meribah (literally, waters of Contention; Numbers 20:1-13; 24:20; Deuteronomy 32:48-52). Aaron's sons, priests of Israel, were also killed when they offered strange fire (Leviticus 10:1-2). In like fashion, Eli's sons, who were both priests, were slain because of their sin (1 Samuel 2:12, 22-25; 4:10-11). God also confronted Saul through Samuel, reminding him that, ". . . *rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king*" (1 Samuel 15:23). Thus, He judged King Saul and his family for rebelling against Him (1 Samuel 31:1-13). Again, Josiah was a godly king in every way, but disobeyed the Lord by fighting King Necho of Egypt and was killed in battle (2 Chronicles 35:20-26). King David was also punished because of his sin against the Lord with Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Samuel 12:7-14). If these examples are sufficient, God still promises to chasten his children (Hebrews 12), even to the point of death if necessary (1 John 5:16; 1 Corinthians 11:27-32; Acts 5:1-11). Thus, the pastor is God's responsibility.

This biblical principle can be illustrated by considering two churches that faced similar circumstances. Each church was being led by its respective pastor to change denominations. In the first case, several deacons went to a denominational executive for counsel. He asked those men if they had prayed about calling this man as pastor. They responded with a "yes." Next, he asked if they had believed it was God's will to call him, and again they said "yes." Then, with great wisdom, he suggested they get down and pray that God would deal with him. They prayed and the church changed denominations. But, the pastor left a few weeks later and within a month the church had returned to its original standing. What a great testimony to God's power! In the second case, several deacons also went to a denominational executive for counsel. The advice they received, however, was to sue for the church's property and existing funds. This turned into a two year court battle, often making the headlines of local newspapers.

Hence, if a church gets on its knees and prays for God to send them a leader, they should trust God to take care of the leader He gives them. This avenue of action is far superior to assuming responsibility for running the preacher off. If they feel their preacher is giving wrong direction to the church, they should trust God to handle him. This is the principle David, the man after God's own heart, had to master. Saul hated him, chased him, and even tried to kill him several times (1 Samuel 18:10-11; 19:1, 9-11; 21:10; 27:1). But, David learned not to take this problem into his own hands. David had two opportunities to kill Saul, but would not. He did, on the first occasion, cut a piece from Saul's garment (24:4). However, he was strongly convicted about the sinfulness of this act (24:5-7). At his second opportunity to kill Saul, he warned his men that anyone who

killed Saul would be killing one of God's anointed and would not be "guiltless" (26:6-12). He told his men, "*As the LORD lives, the LORD shall strike him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish. {11} The LORD forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed*" (1 Sam 26:10-11a). Later, David executed the messenger boy who admitted helping Saul, at Saul's request, kill himself because of the terrible wound he had received in battle (2 Samuel 1:1-16). Thus, God took care of Saul and He can take care of the pastor of His flock.

By Nurturing Pastor-Deacon Relationships

The Miriam and Aaron Complex

In Numbers 12, both Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses "*because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married . . .*" (Numbers 12:1). This conflict was evidently instigated by Miriam, Moses' sister. In any event, both she and Aaron questioned Moses' authority by asking, "*Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?*" (v.2). The verse continues, however, "*And the LORD heard it.*" At this point, He called all three of them to the door of the tabernacle and proceeded to rebuke Miriam and Aaron (vv. 4-9). When His presence left, Miriam was found to be leprous (v.10). Because of her condition, Aaron repented and cried out to Moses for forgiveness of their "*sin*" (vv.11-12). Moses then prayed to God and He healed Miriam, although He sent her outside the camp for seven days (vv.13-15).

In this story, Miriam and Aaron were not deacons, but like the deacon, they held special places of leadership. As such, they had to learn what it means to respect God-

given leadership. Though they both had considerable leadership positions of their own, they were to respect Moses as the primary leader, chosen by God. Sometimes it may be hard for the deacon to accept the pastor's attitude, direction, or suggestions. The pastor may have an unappealing personality and may at times be stern or unfriendly. Sometimes, no doubt, he will even be wrong. Nonetheless, he has been placed in the church by the Holy Spirit. Acts 20:28 is directed to pastors and says, "*Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood*" [emphasis added]. Thus, the pastor is to be respected as God's chosen and appointed leader. This being the case, God calls the deacon to let the pastor lead with joy and not with the burden of opposition (Hebrews 13:17).

The Korah Complex

Numbers 16 and 17 gives the account of a major rebellion led against Moses and Aaron. Korah and several other Levites led about two-hundred and fifty "*leaders,*" who were "*representatives of the congregation, men of renown,*" to rise up in rebellion (16:1-2). These influential laymen made three basic accusations: [1] That Moses and Aaron were assuming too much authority and were exalting themselves above the congregation. They considered this to be unwarranted aggression since, in their opinion, the whole congregation was "*holy, every one of them, and the Lord [was] among them*" (v.3); [2] That Moses was not doing his job because they had not arrived in the land flowing with milk and honey. All he was doing, they said, was "*acting like a prince over us*" (v. 13);

and [3] That Moses was being mean to them. They claimed he was already trying to kill them (v. 13), and now he wanted to gouge their eyes out (v. 14).

Moses responded to these accusations first of all by praying (v.4). He then tried reason, asking them to consider the special positions of leadership already entrusted to them by the Lord. Was this not enough? Was this a “small” thing? Did they now want to usurp the priesthood also (vv.8-10)? Next, he faithfully pointed out their sin of rebellion (vv. 5-7, 11). Finally, due to their ardent stubbornness, Moses challenged them to stand against the Lord by bringing incense burners before Him if they so desired (vv.15-19).

The Lord responded by judging their rebellion. At first, He was going to consume the whole congregation, but Moses interceded on their behalf. Thus, God gave the people a chance to separate themselves from the leaders of this rebellion. Then Moses spoke God’s word (vv. 28-30), and God miraculously judged the rebels accordingly. Initially, He caused a great earthquake to swallow Korah and the other Levites along with their families and possessions for having instigated this rebellion (vv. 31-34). He then sent fire down from heaven consuming the two hundred and fifty men offering incense to the Lord; no one but a priest was to perform this function (vv. 35-40). In response to this act of God, rather than repenting, the whole *“congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, saying, ‘You have killed the people of the Lord’”* (Numbers 16:41). Immediately, the Lord covered the tabernacle, and a plague swept through the people (16:42-45). Moses and Aaron pleaded with the Lord not to kill them and offered an atonement for their sins which stayed the plague (16:46-50).

To settle the issue of who was to be in charge, God then told Moses to gather a

rod from each of the Twelve Tribes with the name of their leader written on it. These dead sticks were to be laid before the Ark in the tabernacle. The stick that bloomed was to indicate the person God had chosen to lead. As God said, “*And it shall be that the rod of the man whom I choose will blossom; thus I will rid Myself of the complaints of the children of Israel, which they make against you*” (17:5). As expected, it was Aaron’s rod that bloomed. Moses then showed this rod to the people, providing specific evidence for who they were to follow as God’s chosen priest. Furthermore, this rod was to be kept as a reminder of God’s decision:

*Bring Aaron’s rod back before the Testimony, to be kept as a sign
against the rebels, that you may put their complaints away from Me, lest
they die.*
Numbers 17:10b

Thus, the Lord clearly made His will known to the *rebels*.

Josephus, the ancient Jewish historian, commented about the tragedy of this period in Israel’s history. His summary pointedly shows the reality of their continued rebellion:

Such a sedition overtook them, as we have not the like example either
among the Greeks or the Barbarians, by which they were in danger of being
all destroyed . . .¹⁶

His estimate, then, was that professed believers of that day were involved in more gross carnality of spirit than could even be found in the secular world. The deacon may try to find comfort in surmising that such incidents do not presently occur. But in fact, mean things do happen in the church today--things that one would not even expect to happen in the local tavern. That is, some laymen today have assumed similar attitudes to those of

¹⁶ Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* [4.2.12], in *The Works of Josephus*, Comp. and unabrdg. in one vol., trans. William Whiston (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Pub., Inc., 1987), 102.

Korah, attempting to usurp pastoral authority and making accusations that their preacher is not doing his job and that he is being cruel to the church.

Others think such derelictions are to be welcomed, believing that every “good ole boy” should stand up for his “rights.” Consequently, one of two things happen. Their actions are either ignored, leaving the pastor to fend for himself, or, they are sanctified by such comments as, “We just need to understand those men.” However, the Bible indicates that a perpetually contentious man is an unregenerate man. For instance, Jude compares lost apostates to Korah in his epistle: *“Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah”* (Jude 11). The Bible is clear elsewhere on this subject also. Strife and envy are works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21) and are considered demonic, earthly, and sensual (James 3:14-16). Causing contention is unquestionably a sin, and one who habitually practices sin does not know God (1 John 3:6-10). Thus, what is often called being “funny turned,” is described in the Bible as *rebellion*, and those who practice it are described as *lost*.

The following story is an example of a few deacons who acted, at least in this situation, much like Miriam or Korah did years ago:

Pastor R. was pastoring his first church. The church began to grow and the Chairman of Deacons became quite uncomfortable. There were just too many new people. A conflict ensued and quickly escalated.

Then one Sunday morning, between Sunday School and Morning worship, there was an urgent call for a deacons’ meeting. Pastor R. asked if there was an emergency or could the matter wait until after church? The Chairman’s son, another husky 200 pound deacon, firmly grasped his arm and informed him he was going to the meeting. Once in the back meeting room, the issue was presented. The deacons needed to approve taking an offering for the Easter morning breakfast.

These men eventually left and the church grew. Later, on the pastor’s

last Sunday, these men finally made it back to church. As they sat on the back row, it was evident they had come to reclaim “their” church. It was “their” church in one sense because they were from the same family.¹⁷

Pastor R. believes these four deacons originally wanted a young, inexperienced pastor so they could dictate the direction of the church. He says that after these men left, new deacons were elected. They were faithful men who often visited and prayed with and for their pastor. Their fellowship together was sweet and the church prospered.

The story of another seasoned pastor is also enlightening:

Pastor H. was called to a church and it began to experience substantial growth. However, this did not please some members. The Chairman of Deacons (who was past Chairman of the Pulpit Committee) became upset. This man, who was supposedly a “spiritual giant,” turned against the pastor, and led two or three other deacons to do the same. Pastor H. attempted to settle this issue by following the Scriptural admonitions of Jesus in Matthew 18. He went to them privately, and then took others, but eventually had to bring the issue before the church.

When the meeting convened, the church was packed. Pastor H. shared that many negative things had been said and done behind closed doors, through phone calls, and in secret meetings. He then opened the platform for anyone to present a biblical or moral discrepancy in his life or ministry.

However, no one came forward; no one had anything to say. He then suggested the church make a decision to keep these three men as deacons or him as pastor. An overwhelming majority voted for him to stay as pastor, standing to give a tremendous applause. Twelve people left the meeting. The church became one of the fastest growing in the nation.

Pastor H. says he regretted that this had to happen but that many times “carnal church men have no fear of God.” Further, after 33 years in full-time ministry, he says that many times the most carnal man in the church will ascend to being a deacon. In his words,

The most camouflaged, carnal man you’ve got in your church will ultimately rise to the level of deacon and then try to destroy you. He doesn’t drink, he doesn’t cuss, he doesn’t run around with wild women,

¹⁷ Personal interview by the author, 26 January 1995, tape recorded.

but he's a carnal man. He runs his business carnal, he never studies the Word of God, and he spends no time in prayer. But, because he has a lot of influence and because his family has been in the church a long time, he is camouflaged in his carnality. Some people think he's a spiritual giant, when really he's a carnal man. He will ultimately become a deacon. And, because I do not believe that "the deaconship" is a biblical position in the New Testament church, he is out of God's will. Knowingly or unknowingly, he will start to attack the pastor . . . When 164 Southern Baptist pastors per month are fired--not quit, not resign, not taking another church--but fired, something is wrong; something must be done.¹⁸

No doubt, there are some tremendous problems. And what is sad is that many times there seems to be only two options. Either maintain peace with those in control and let the church die, or make a stand, which often leads to a fight, and see the church grow. Neither option is good, but the first option is chosen most often. However, the second option may be what is needed. A third option, prayerfully speaking, is that the church can grow without having a fight. Nevertheless, almost 80% of Southern Baptist churches are stagnant or declining so there may be some hard decisions that have to be made. In many churches, it will depend on the attitude of the deacons as to what will take place.

Because of these and similar problems, the pastor may sometimes feel hopeless. But, this same feeling probably haunted Joshua as he assumed primary leadership of Israel after Moses' death. Having walked with Moses, he had witnessed Israel's rebellion firsthand. Thus, the Lord graciously equipped him with an encouraging promise at the time of his call (Joshua 1:1-9). Commenting on these verses, Charles Stanley says:

. . . Three times in those verses He said to him the same thing, 'Be strong and courageous . . . be strong and courageous . . . be strong and courageous.' And my friend, to be a leader today in a church, you've got to be strong and courageous. Some people have the idea that if you're

¹⁸ A personal interview by the author, 7 February 1995, tape recorded.

strong and courageous, you're trying to be a dictator. Listen, how long do you think Joshua would have lasted had he not been strong before God, strong and courageous as a leader. You can be strong and courageous without being a dictator. Some people will think you are because you want what God wants. You want God's best, and God has placed you there-- *not as a follower* in the flock. That's why I believe that any group of deacons, no matter who they are, any board, who feels that it is their responsibility to govern and to guard and to guide the church and the pastor is to serve as their servant has totally missed the whole Scriptural viewpoint of a man being a shepherd, and a leader, and a prophet of God.¹⁹

Accordingly, no matter what the problems, may the present-day shepherd strengthen himself and place his hope in God. By principle, the same promise made to Joshua is available to every God-called pastor.

By Nurturing Deacon-Church Relationships

The deacon should maintain a positive, honest, and fruitful relationship with the church he serves--he should never foster confusion and ill-will. However, survey results compiled by the writer from Southern Baptist churches across the United States indicate that deacons are not always helpful. Some deacons are evidently lazy in ministry and zealous in promoting strife. For instance, one person having served for almost twenty years in the same church shared the following letter:

Thank you for your letter and the opportunity to share my feelings on these matters. Some of the questions have made me stop and consider how I feel about the deacon ministry and about what the Bible says about deacons. I know there is always room for improvement in all areas of our lives, so I don't want to be a fault finder, but I do want to be as honest as I can. I have not been very satisfied with our overall deacon ministry for the

¹⁹ Charles Stanley, "The Place of Prayer in Pastoral Leadership," tape 2 of 4 in the series *The Place of Prayer in the Life and Ministry of the Servant of God*, delivered for the Spring Lectures, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas, 1989, 4 Messages, Audio cassette.

following reasons.

First, we have a Deacon Family Ministry Plan at our church. I don't know how most people are served, but I know that many aren't considered at all. Our deacons take up the offering and are concerned about some things that aren't their responsibility--they are not concerned about many things that are their responsibility.

Second, one of our deacons is a single man in his late seventies. He has always been a member of this church. He has served as Treasurer since we have been here. He seems to feel that the money belongs to him personally. There has never been any indication of spiritual depth to this man. I served on a committee with him at one point. There were four of us and we made a unanimous decision to bring back to the church at the next Business Meeting. When we were to report, he got up and offered a motion that was exactly opposite of what had been decided--simply because he wanted it that way. We just sat there stunned and silent while his motion went over. I was so convicted a few years later about misleading the people by not speaking up, one night I confessed to the church that I had been part of a deception. I did not share any specifics, I just ask their forgiveness. No one ever asked me what the problem was or anything about it. If I were to tell some of them, they would think I was lying. The other committee members have been content to leave it alone, but I feel that I did what I should.

This same man has been on a campaign in the past few months to discredit our pastor, especially with the older folks. They have known him so many years he has considerable influence on them. This man owns a business and is a large contributor (at least to the causes in which he believes). We have had a new pastor for several months now, but this man has never accepted him and is causing a lot of controversy. My prayer is that we will all be peacemakers in our church.

This is a tragic story. Nonetheless, it may represent what is taking place in churches all across the SBC. When a church is operated in this manner, its growth will necessarily be stunted. The end result is that many people in the community will die without Christ.

Dr. Doyle Young, a former professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, has noted that one has to laugh to keep from crying when considering various problems that have occurred in the church. The following story should be sufficient to illustrate the point:

The story is told of a small Baptist church in Mayfield County, Kentucky, which in the late 1800's had only two deacons. These two irascible fellows hated each other, and if one favored some proposal, the other's opposition was guaranteed. One week the first deacon put a small wooden peg in the back wall of the frame church building so that the preacher-boy could hang his hat there on Sunday. When the second deacon saw the peg the next Sunday, he demanded to know who had done such a thing without consulting him. The church members took sides and the church eventually split. And to this day, the story goes, you can find in Mayfield County, Kentucky, the Anti-peg Baptist Church.²⁰

This story is one that gives a definite example of how not to behave as a deacon. Suffice it to say, the deacon can never rationalize the sin of either encouraging someone else's complaints or being the instigator of such carnality. He is not to attack or slander, publicly or privately, either his pastor, his fellow deacons, or any of the saints of God. If he does, he should have the integrity to resign. The deacon who does not step down voluntarily should be confronted by his church and asked to resign. When this takes place, the deacon should not become irate. It is right for his church to do this because the Bible says that God "*hates . . . one who sows discord among the brethren*" (Proverbs 6:16-19).

But, how can a church tell if a man is not promoting peace and harmony within the congregation? The following character sketch may prove helpful in answering this question: The deacon may be a problem . . .

- if he is not witnessing to others.
- if he rarely discusses spiritual matters in his everyday conversation.
- if he is not a prayer warrior at home and in his private life.
- if he is not consistently experiencing personal growth in his Christian life.
- if he is not concerned with or able to deal with at least a few of the meatier things of the Word of God.
- if he is an opposer, especially when his will is crossed.

²⁰ Doyle L. Young, *New Life For Your Church: A Renewal Handbook for Pastors* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 63.

- if he is not involved in ministering to people on a regular basis.
- if he is highly interested in who gets to keep up with the money.
- if he gets irate when the church begins to grow and he feels he is losing “control.”
- if he demands all decisions be passed by him (whether he does this openly or by secretly opposing things done without his permission).
- if he drinks, curses, and chews while running around with others who do.
- if he thinks the church is healthy because they have been able to save some money.
- if he is unfriendly toward new guests or members in the church.
- if he shows up at deacon’s meetings and business meetings, but doesn’t have time for visiting, soul-winning, or discipling others.
- if he opposes others by secretly talking on the phone or planning private meetings.
- if he slowly begins to do vindictive things to “run” the preacher off.
- if he quits giving when he doesn’t get his way.
- if he attempts to persecute rather than protect his pastor.
- if he views the church as a secular business or fraternal organization, thus ignoring biblical principles regarding church function.
- if he believes the deacons are to function as a board.
- if he believes the deacons are overseers of the church.
- if he is not spiritually minded.

The list could go on--this is not an exhaustive treatment. However, these indicators should provide a starting place for detecting problems. Though any deacon may have one or two of these characteristics on rare occasions, having one or more of them on a consistent basis will usually indicate trouble. If such a man exists in the church, it may be that the godly deacons need to take responsibility for confronting him.

Finally, the wise deacon will remember that every incidence of conflict in the church can either be calmed or exaggerated. John Maxwell has reminded his church leadership that an opportunity exists to throw either “water” or “gas” on every “fire” in the church.²¹ Thus, the deacon should be careful not to stoke an existing fire and should practice every precaution against sparking a blaze of his own (Proverbs 26:20-21).

²¹ John Maxwell, *Developing Leaders thru Discipleship*, Lesson II, produced by Injoy Life Ministries (1530 Jamacha Road, Suite D, El Cajon, CA., 92019; (1-800-333-6506), 1990, videocassette.

Solving Problems By Practicing Church Discipline

A final issue the deacon should be familiar with is church discipline.²² Since his calling involves working with many different people, he will necessarily be exposed to problems. Therefore, the deacon at some time may be involved in disciplining a brother or sister. Though this practice has received little attention in the modern church, it is the biblical way to deal with conflict and difficult situations. However, this approach may not always be popular. The attitude of many in today's church tends to be, "I know I will have to give an account to God in the future, but don't mess with my life right now." But, any hope there might be of maintaining purity and harmony in the body of Christ will require following the Scriptural commands for church discipline (Matthew 18:15-20; Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 with 2 Corinthians 13:1-3; Titus 3:10; 1 Timothy 1:20; Acts 5:1-11; etc.). Church discipline is God's loving way of restoring sinful Christians to fellowship with Him and His body.

Application # 2 - The Ministry of Caring for People

Caring for People Means Meeting Their Needs

Acts 6 shows that the conflict in the Jerusalem church occurred ". . . *because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution . . .*" (Acts 6:1). Thus, the problem resulted from certain persons feeling neglected. Accordingly, the first deacons were set

²² For further study see J. Carl Laney, *A Guide to Church Discipline: God's Loving Plan for Restoring Believers to Fellowship with Himself and with the Body of Christ* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Pub., 1985) or Don Baker, *Beyond Forgiveness: The Healing Touch of Church Discipline* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1984).

aside to settle this conflict *by ministering to people's needs*.

Whether the “*distribution*” was one of food or money may be debated. In 11:29 the same word, *diakonia*, is translated “relief.” The New International Version renders it “food.” Robertson states that it is referring to the “help from the common fund provided for all who need it (Acts 4:32-37).”²³ If it is a reference to money, then it was money set aside for benevolent purposes such as purchasing food. In any case, it is clear that the entire finances and administration of the church are not in view. Such overseeing functions were still the responsibility of the elders (Acts 4:32-37; 11:29-30). The deacons’ charge was to make sure that the resources gathered on behalf of the widows for food and other necessities were properly administered. Clearly, the passage is focusing on the church’s *widows*, not on overseeing the corporate church.

These “*widows*” had probably moved from other towns to be near the Holy City, possibly wanting to be buried there. If so, they may have had no near kin to provide for them. Furthermore, because they were now Christians, temple funds were no longer available to them.²⁴ Whatever the reason, these women were having a hard time. Their circumstances, however, gave the church an excellent opportunity to express the love of Christ to them through practical means.

Being from a Jewish background, those in the first church were no doubt well aware of God’s commands to care for the poor. They also had been accustomed to an

²³ A. T. Robertson, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 vols. ([Nashville]: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1930; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, n. d.), 72.

²⁴ Longenecker, 330.

effective way of dealing with this responsibility to the poor. William Barclay describes how the Jewish religion cared for their needy in the following account:

No nation has ever had a greater sense of responsibility for the less fortunate brethren than the Jews.

In the synagogue there was a routine custom. Two collectors went round the market and the private houses every Friday morning and made a collection for the needy partly in money and partly in goods. Later in the day this was distributed. Those who were temporarily in need received enough to enable them to carry on; and those who were permanently unable to support themselves received enough for fourteen meals, that is, enough for two meals a day for the ensuing week. The fund from which this distribution was made was called the *Kuppah* or Basket. In addition to this a house-to-house collection was made daily for those in pressing need. This was called the *Tamhui*, or Tray.²⁵

Whether or not the Christian church utilized this identical methodology is not known, but at least they had adopted the spirit of caring. Lumby makes an apt point by commenting, “In these early days they appear to have acted according to St. James’ teaching (James 1:27) . . .”²⁶ James, the half brother of Jesus and subsequent pastor of this same church, says in his practical way: “*Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble . . .*” (James 1:27).

Considering Acts 6, Alexander Strauch suggests that in contemporary language the title “social worker” best designates the deacon and his function:

Through the deacons, the local church’s charitable activities are effectively organized and centralized. The deacons are collectors of funds, distributors of relief, and agents of mercy. They help the poor, the jobless, the sick, the widowed, the elderly, the homeless, the shut-in, the refugees, and the disabled. They counsel and guide people. They visit people in their homes. They relieve suffering. They comfort, protect, and encourage

²⁵ Barclay, 51.

²⁶ Lumby, 152.

people, and help to meet their needs. In contemporary language, they are the congregation's social workers.²⁷

The deacon, then, is to focus on caring for people. Helping the helpless is good because it is commanded by God and people need to be loved. Also, those who are properly cared for usually maintain a good spirit, getting along with others around them. No one enjoys being hungry or being too broke for a doctor's visit. Hence, meeting people's basic needs has both theological and practical significance.

Caring for People Means Focusing on People, Not Programs

Believers can become so busy doing "church work" that they forget about meeting people's needs. If such ministry is neglected by church members, the church's pastors are usually called upon to do the task. It is impossible, however, for pastors to meet every individual's needs while trying to preach, pray, and give direction to the church. When this problem arose in the early church, the apostle's thought it wise to turn the ministry of people's needs over to the people themselves. As laymen, the deacons were the "people" called upon to help organize such ministry among the church body. In the words of Alan Tungett:

In Acts 6, the early church made a decision that would forever change the role of pastor and staff. They made the decision to give the ministry to the people. The idea was brought to the church and the church "approved" it. The role of the pastor was changed forever. The leaders were to be the administrators and the people were to be the ministers.

The role of the pastor and staff is one of the most crucial and critical issues that a church must face if it really wants to reach its community. Most congregations see the role of the pastor and staff as that of "paid

²⁷ Alexander Strauch, *The New Testament Deacon: The Church's Minister of Mercy* (Littleton, Colorado; Lewis & Roth Pub., 1992), 156.

ministers.” They are “hired” to do the work of the church. This thinking may help to explain why we have so many congregations in the Southern Baptist Convention that average fewer than 150 in enrollment.²⁸

This New Testament pattern should be adopted by the church today. However, in many churches the role of the deacon is interpreted much differently. Often, he runs the church while the pastor preaches and performs everyday ministry. The following summary adapted from one church’s constitution (which will be left anonymous) can be used to illustrate how these roles are often reversed:

(1) *The Pastor’s Leadership Role* - The pastor is responsible for preaching, teaching, administrating the staff, and pastoral ministries. This includes visiting members, prospects, and others. It also includes performing weddings, funerals, etc.

(2) *The Deacon’s Servant Role* - The deacons are to be the “servants” of the church. However, a deacon is elected to serve not only in a role of a spiritual leader but also in other roles of service as well. This includes giving advice to the pastor concerning all areas of church life. Though the pastor should have “input” on all decisions, the deacons should present these decisions to the church. Committees, including the budget and finance committee, are to report to the deacons. The deacons will consider the committee work, vote on the business at hand, and, if found acceptable, will present it to the church. This allows the deacons to study matters and then present what is best to the church. Chairmen of committees can present something to the church, but it is to be understood that the deacons have not approved it nor had a chance to consider it. This whole process is to assure that an orderly way of doing business is maintained, especially during business meetings of the church body.

“The active deacons shall have authority to do and perform all things necessary to conduct the day-to-day affairs and property of the church.” Other responsibilities include having “oversight” of church discipline, along with the pastor. The deacons are to always be responsible for filling the pulpit, serving as a general pulpit supply committee. They shall provide for an annual audit of all books and financial standings of the church.

This general description of the pastor-deacon roles is clearly contrary to all the

²⁸ Alan Tungett, “Growing Churches Have Leaders Who Think,” in *Growing Churches* (Winter 1995): 26.

stated principles of the New Testament. Having such an unscriptural practice will always result in chaos: (1) there will be conflict, (2) there will be stagnation, and (3) people's needs will be neglected. If layleaders (i.e., deacons) do not fulfill their responsibility of focusing on people, then ministry is not performed. If they fail to lead in ministry, the church body will fail to minister.

Wherefore, like the original deacons, the modern deacon should focus on the everyday, practical problems of the people. As Dr. Criswell, pastor of the SBC's largest church, says:

The deacons of the church were the servants of the church. They were chosen for that assignment, to help, to save, to care for the temporal necessities of the people.²⁹

Though many suggestions may be made concerning the deacons' possible areas of service, one thing must always be remembered--it is a biblical principle that God's people, not things, are to come first.

Application # 3 - The Ministry of Serving the Pastor

By Following His Leadership

There are numerous ways a deacon can serve his pastor. But, the success of any attempt at service will hinge upon one foundational truth: the deacon must be willing to follow his pastor's leadership. Such a commitment is the most honorable gift any layperson could afford their pastor; it is the ultimate act of service.

²⁹ W. A. Criswell, *Criswell's Guidebook for Pastors* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1980), 217. Cited hereafter as Criswell, *Guidebook*.

Often, however, this truth is never openly admitted. When it is acknowledged, it is seldom followed. It is the natural tendency of all human beings to do things their own way. In the church, this causes many to disregard pastoral leadership. Many times deacons and members alike do what they please. As Dr. Charles Stanley has said,

. . . You're going to have some people in places of leadership who have no earthly idea what a single spiritual principle is, and their whole perspective on the church is that you do business in the church like you do business in the world. You're going to have deacons, or board members, who drink, and who do not understand why you think that is a sin. You're going to have people who have the idea that, 'You're the pastor, we're the deacons. The deacons run the church. You do what we tell you to do.' And so they see you as their servant. And you're to do what they say to do--they are the leadership of the church. You're going to have folks who not only want to run the church, but they want to run you. They expect your wife to be a "Superwoman," expect you to be a "Superman," and cannot understand why you are not, because, after all, you were trained to be that. They expect you to be the best at what you're doing, and they see that their goal in life is to keep you poor while God keeps you humble. And that is their attitude about the ministry . . .³⁰

Such attitudes lack in spiritual goodness and are contrary to God's standards for the church. Thus, the deacon should help teach his church to follow the leadership of their pastor and pastoral staff.

Frequently, the deacon has not been taught that pastoral leadership is a God-given principle. As a matter of fact, recent Southern Baptist writings have taught just the opposite. However, this has not always been the case. Historically, Baptists have emphasized the biblical principle of pastoral leadership. For instance, McConnell says,

The deacons were assistants to the preachers, taking part of the work, relieving them, so that they could have time and strength for the ministry of the word and prayer. Some take the position that a pastor should not have

³⁰ Stanley, "The Place of Prayer in Pastoral Leadership," audio cassette.

anything to do with the financial, or material, affairs of the church. They hold that such matters are outside of his rightful sphere. They claim that the deacons have a right to manage all such matters and that the pastors meddle in things which do not rightfully concern them when they plan, or look after, church finances, property, resources, and expenditures.

This position is not Scriptural. The preachers, primarily, had all such matters in their hands. The deacons were chosen to relieve them of the burden of administration. Had those seven men neglected to do their work, the duty of relieving needy widows would still have been upon the preachers. So it is with pastors of churches now. They are the overseers of the organization, the deacons are elected to assist in temporal matters; but this does not create a new possibly conflicting sphere of activity. The pastors are still, primarily, responsible, and they must see that the service is rendered by the deacons in such a way as promotes the welfare of the organization . . .³¹

Once most deacons have been taught the biblical principles concerning their given task in the church, they will have no problem following these commands. They desire to do God's will and respect the authority of His Word. Therefore, the deacon should not feel condemned, especially if his attempts to oversee the church were based on an errant understanding of his role. Let him learn from those mistakes and start doing what is right.

For a church to be healthy, it must be pastor-led. Often, however, churches make pastors responsible for leading the congregation, but do not extend to them the authority necessary for carrying out that task. As Pastor Thomas Hatley has said,

Numerous churches call a pastor to lead them, but give him a deacon's job description. Further, he is usually expected to gather information about church growth, business decisions, and other issues and present it to the deacons. They either approve or disapprove, but make the ultimate decisions. This is reversed leadership. This is the opposite of what the Scriptures teach.³²

³¹ McConnell, 89-90.

³² Thomas Hatley, Senior Pastor, Immanuel Baptist Church, Rogers, Arkansas, interview by author, 12 December 1995, telephone conversation.

Thus, the pastor is often hindered from effectively performing his duties, constantly having to seek permission from the deacons, committees, and church. Consequently, their denials generally prevent him from doing what he believes should be done. Nonetheless, it is the pastor who gets fired if the church falters, regardless of how often he has been vetoed or how often things have been voted in against his better judgement. Conversely, how often does a church dismiss its deacon board when the church is dying? Never.

If the pastor is *responsible* for leading the church, then he should have the *freedom* and *authority* to lead the church. As Roger Spradlin has pointed out,

Perhaps a distinction should be made between authority and responsibility when implementing a church's structure. Clearly, the pastor has responsibility for leading the church. This includes spiritual concerns, but the pastor also has a responsibility to lead in all areas of church life. If a pastor has the primary leadership responsibility, then perhaps the church should invest him with the primary authority for leadership.

Congregational rule should be more than simple democracy with each member voting his or her personal opinion. A congregation should have a natural tendency to follow the pastor's leadership, since his position carries the responsibility and authority of a biblical office, unless there is clear direction from God that he has missed God's will.³³

The deacon's role will be to help foster change in his church's expectations by emphasizing the need to follow godly pastoral leadership. This emphasis will include changed thinking about church business meetings. Such meetings often include individuals presenting ideas that have not even been discussed with their pastor. Conversely, business meetings should be times when members decide whether the ideas presented by permission of the pastor and pastoral staff are biblical and wise.

³³ Roger Spradlin, "Church Structure: Building Block or Stumbling Stone to Growth?" in *Growing Churches* 6, no. 1 (Fall 1995): 17.

By Helping Him With Menial Tasks

That the deacons are to serve, support, relieve, and help the pastor, as well as care for the church, is clear in Acts 6:1-6. Thus, Charles Ryrie has stated that, "Deacons were originally the helpers of the elders. Thus their qualifications were practically the same as those of the elders."³⁴ Sumner Wemp has written, "Deacons free the pastor to do his work. If the church wants its pastor to pray and preach, then deacons should be his servants, not his lords."³⁵ Similarly, McConnell saw relieving the pastor as a major priority of the deacons:

The duties of deacons are not specifically laid down in the New Testament. We have their qualifications stated, but their duties are left to the requirements of conditions in the churches. They are to be ASSISTANTS TO THE PREACHERS IN ALL THOSE THINGS WHICH, IF ATTENDED TO BY PREACHERS, WOULD HINDER THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

As for authority, the deacons have none. They are never to try to control the church but to assist the church by their counsel.³⁶

The deacon then should be willing and available to help in any area of church work, especially in relieving his pastor of everyday duties.

However, many deacons only want to supervise their pastor, not serve him. Sometimes deacons' meetings merely serve as an opportunity to scrutinize church finances and the preachers job performance. Where this is true, continuous and long-term fights

³⁴ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976, 1978), 1818, n. 3:8.

³⁵ C. Sumner Wemp, *The Guide to Practical Pastoring* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1982), 137.

³⁶ McConnell, 92, 94.

often ensue leading to frequent changes in pastoral leadership. This practice is wholly unwarranted. As Pastor Kenny Lewis has said, "The deacons' meeting is not something the pastor should have to recover from."³⁷

Not only deacons, but entire churches often misunderstand the pastor's function. It is not uncommon for churches to be proud of their pastor for the long hours he spends going to hospitals and nursing homes, visiting Aunt Bessie, mowing the church yard, painting the buildings, working on the furnace, and other worthy tasks of ministry. That is not, however, the leadership that God has called him to provide; it is not the leadership that will cause the church to grow. Any church that requires their pastor to be the errand boy is a church that is not going to have substantial long-term growth.³⁸

Leadership for the pastor means providing overall direction for the church, not perpetually doing menial tasks. Any group of deacons who will help relieve him of such tasks will be blessed by God. Men who are willing to serve, rather than supervise, will be a blessing to everyone they are around. And, those who do not actively participate in ministry should heed the following words:

The demand for service called for the office. Only those who will do the work should be chosen as deacons. When any man ceases to serve he should be retired.³⁹

³⁷ Kenny Lewis, Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, Brownsville, Texas, interview by writer, 20 September 1995, telephone conversation, tape recorded.

³⁸ Elmer Towns, *The Future of Sunday School and Church Growth*, produced by Church Growth Institute (P. O. Box 4404, Lynchburg, Va., 24502; 1-800-553-4769), 1988, videocassette.

³⁹ McConnell, 89.

By Receiving His Discipleship

A deacon should be desirous to grow in the Christian faith, training and preparing himself for service. Jesus commanded the church to make disciples (Matthew 28:19-20) and Scripture instructs pastors to train others (2 Timothy 2:2). Thus, it is clearly part of the pastor's job to disciple other men (Ephesians 4:11-12). Discipleship is God's method for grounding men and women in the Christian faith. No instant formula exists for making a trained and competent deacon; this quality only comes through diligent preparation.

When there is a lack of training and growth, it is human reason, not God's wisdom that rules the man. This leads to carnality. In this case, not only is the deacon ill-prepared to deal with problems in the church, he will eventually be a problem himself. Bill Hull has strongly spoken to this sin:

Here the pastor faces the obstacle of trying to work with unqualified people who have leadership positions. In many cases leaders who do not walk with God tell pastors how to spend their time and do their job. Such laymen don't pray, meditate on, study, or memorize Scripture. Many have never introduced a single person to Christ. How anyone could lead an organization that purposes to save the world and never lead one person to Christ is the enigma of the church. This kind of duplicity cannot exist even in the business community. Furthermore, such leaders possess no concept or experience in training, reproduction, or multiplication. The prospect that this pathology dominates the local church landscape is tragic. The fact that ungodly men dictate to godly men is one of the institutional church's greatest sins.⁴⁰

The deacon should want to be good at what he does. But, he cannot be good if he is not spiritually mature. Therefore, he should receive training. Jesus calls every believer to be a disciple and disciple means pupil or learner.

⁴⁰ Hull, 32.

By Showing Him Honor

Showing honor is basic to the Christian faith. The Bible states that believers are to honor God (John 5:23) and all people (1 Peter 2:17). This requirement includes showing honor to the representative leaders of all three major institutions ordained by God for organizing society and church: [1] parents (Ephesians 6:1-3), [2] civil authorities (Romans 13:7), and [3] pastors (1 Timothy 5:17).

1 Thessalonians 5:13 further demands respect for pastors by instructing the believer *“to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake.”* Dale Schlafer notes that the Greek construction of this verse intensifies the command three-fold. Thus, he shows the verse could be translated “Honor, honor, honor in love those who work hard among you.” He then makes the following comment with regard to what is being taught:

What we sense here is the apostle Paul’s struggle--almost being at a loss for words--to adequately express what the Holy Spirit wants to communicate to the church, just how much the people in a congregation are to hold their pastor in super highest regard. Pastors are not to be esteemed for their office, degrees, age, or spiritual gifts, but “because of their work” . . . The biblical pattern, then, is for all Christians to show honor to one another, and triple honor to their pastors.⁴¹

However, Schlafer estimates that pastors in present-day American churches are usually not honored. He then conjectures why:

I believe the major reason pastors are not honored, however, is that church members don’t know it’s one of their responsibilities in following Jesus Christ. Some church members simply enjoy tearing down their pastor, but the vast majority fail to honor their pastor just because they are ignorant of God’s Word

⁴¹ Dale Schlafer, “Honoring and Praying for Your Pastor,” in *Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper*, eds. Al Janssen and Larry K. Weeden (Colorado Springs, Co.: Focus on the Family Pub.; Copyright Promise Keepers, 1994), 134.

... How is it that people in the church don't know this teaching to honor their pastors? The answer is that it hasn't been taught. I searched through the books of sermons in my library, some many years old and others quite contemporary, but I could not find one sermon on this topic. Given our age, it's obvious why this is the case. Can you imagine your pastor standing in the pulpit next Sunday and stating, no matter how smoothly, "You as a church body are to give me triple honor"? As soon as you entered your car, you would be saying, "What an egoist! I can't believe the turkey would say something like that. Wow, is he ever full of pride!" Because that's the way most people would react, pastors shy away from this teaching, and the American church continues in its ignorant disobedience to this clear command of God.⁴²

Realizing that those receiving such honor could abuse it, Schlafer further says,

If I were writing to pastors, I would digress at this point to deal with the sins of pride and arrogance with which pastors might be tempted. But right now, at this point in the history of the American church, those sins are not the problem. The hurt, the neglect, the dishonoring have gone on for so long, and with such intensity, that large numbers of pastors are turning in their resignations because they feel so alone and unsupported. One recent poll revealed that 80 percent of the pastors responding had thought about quitting in the last three months. Yes in some immature men, triple honoring might cause a problem. But for the vast majority of godly pastors, honoring and lifting them up will cause them to be more motivated and even harder workers. They will be encouraged, and their churches will be blessed.⁴³

This responsibility to honor pastors should not be ignored by the deacon. Being set aside to serve the pastor, he should take the lead in showing honor to him and in teaching others in the church to do the same.

If the deacon balks at the idea of showing honor to his pastor, then he should not expect his wife, children, or employees to honor him. Why? Because, as mentioned above, all authority structures are given by God (Ephesians 5:22-6:9). For instance, a

⁴² Ibid., 134-35.

⁴³ Ibid., 136.

father's right to discipline a son is not based on his being bigger, stronger, smarter, or wiser, though he is probably all those things. Rather, he disciplines his son because God has admonished him to do so (Ephesians 6:4). When God commands His children to do things, that makes doing those things right. Similarly, God has told Christians to honor leaders out of a submissive heart. This specification entails the deacon and the church being submissive to their pastor. Consequently, the deacon is prohibited from attempts to subvert pastoral leadership; at times he may even need to seek his pastor's approval.

By Protecting His Position

The deacon can also support his pastor by protecting his position. Many deacons have led coups to rid the church of their pastor. However, this practice is not biblical--it is sinful. As mentioned above, if the pastor has done something morally or doctrinally wrong, then Scriptural steps are to be followed (1 Timothy 5:17-20). Never, under any circumstances, can gossip and slander be justified. The following statement reminds a Christian church how they are to treat the pastor God has given them:

Any church that loves and honors its pastor, whatever its size, is a wonderful church. The obverse of that is also true. Any church that looks upon its pastor as a hireling is a weak and unblessed church. There is no exception to that in the ecclesiastical world.

If a church wants to get rid of its pastor, let the church pray for him. God answers prayer. Pray for him, and he will become such a good pastor and preacher that some other church will call him and take him off their hands. It will work. To love and honor your pastor is the will of God. He is God's ordained leader in the church.⁴⁴

Those who love and support their pastor in this way will certainly be blessed by God

⁴⁴ W. A. Criswell, *Great Doctrines of the Bible*, vol. 3, *Ecclesiology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1983), 101.

(Matthew 10:41-42). Those who don't can expect to answer to God for their rebellion (Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24; cf. Numbers 12-13, 15-16).

When a pastor experiences conflict with his church and/or deacons, he knows there is a lot on the line. He is faced with the possibility of losing his job, finances, housing, church family, and with having to move his family to a new community. Thus, the price paid for a fight between pastor and deacon is much higher for the pastor. If such an unfortunate circumstance does arise, it would be much easier for the deacon to find another local church. Because of this, when one deacon requested his pastor's resignation, the pastor responded: "Instead of asking me to leave, why don't you leave. If I leave I must move my family, change jobs, and start all over again. All you have to do is take a left instead of a right when pulling out of your driveway on Sunday mornings." Hopefully things will not get this bad.

Further, if the deacon has been hurt by his pastor, he might seek to understand the root of the problem. Was the fight over the very issues being discussed? Can he say that he has fully honored, loved, supported, and protected his spiritual leader? Or, did he compete with him for being the primary leader in the church? Did he entangle himself in a power struggle with the shepherd of God? Certainly the pastor may be wrong, but it is also possible that anger has been engendered toward him because of his stand against sin.

By Praying For His Spiritual Needs

Pastors need prayer for every area of their lives--their walk with God, their family, their purity, their preaching and teaching, their physical well-being, and for wisdom in

directing the church. Such praying not only benefits the pastor, however, but the whole church. That is, when the deacon ardently prays for his pastor, he is in effect praying that God would bless him, his family, and his church with a solid spiritual shepherd. Thus, a prayer prayed for the pastor is a prayer prayed for the spiritual well-being of every family in the church.

The deacon should especially pray for his pastor to consistently feed the sheep God's dynamic Word. This activity will affect the spiritual vitality of the whole flock. If the congregation is not being fed, the deacon needs to pray for his pastor's boldness. As Dale Schlafer has stated,

Pastors need prayer especially for their preaching and teaching of the Word. Again I ask, why are pastors not preaching what they really believe is the word of God for their congregations? The answer is, I believe, that they are afraid--afraid the people of their churches will not accept the kind of preaching that clearly and powerfully confronts sin and sinners. Afraid they will be fired and lose their financial security. As a result, in many cases, God's purposes are thwarted and our churches remain weak and sick.⁴⁵

It is a certainty that pastors will never preach God's truth to their fullest potential if men are not praying for them. This fact is clearly presented in Scripture. For example, in Acts 4:23-31 Peter and John pray for boldness to preach in the midst of heavy persecution: *"Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, . . ."* (4:29). In response, God brought this prayer to fruition through the mighty power of His presence: *"And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy*

⁴⁵ Schlafer, 137.

Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness” (4:31). What an awesome God! Neither anyone or anything can stand against His Presence, for where He is He subverts evil. His Presence is the spiritual impetus that causes every missionary soldier of Christ to be resilient when meeting evil resistance and seemingly impervious strongholds.

Again, Paul emphasizes the critical importance of praying for those who preach when teaching the Ephesian church how to prepare for spiritual warfare. The principles he gave them are likewise to be imperatives for the church today:

{18} praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit . . . for all the saints; {19} and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, {20} for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. Ephesians 6:18-20

This truth has been thoughtfully illustrated by E. M. Bounds who says,

The men in the pew given to praying for the pastor are like poles which hold up the wires along which the electric current runs. They are not the power, neither are they the specific agents in making the Word of the Lord effective. But they hold up the wires upon which the divine power runs to the hearts of men . . . They make conditions favorable for the preaching of the Gospel.⁴⁶

The results of such praying can also be illustrated by looking to Dr. Wilbur Chapman, one of the great preachers of America. As a young man he went to pastor the Wannamaker Church in Philadelphia. Despite his age, his experience at the church was a blessed one due to the prayers of the church’s laymen. This ministry started with only three people, but eventually included over two hundred men meeting to pray prior to each service. What was the outcome? In the words of Dr. Chapman,

⁴⁶ E. M. Bounds, *A Treasury of Prayer--The Best of E. M. Bounds* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1961), 172-173, as cited in Schlafer, 138.

I always went into the pulpit feeling that I would have the anointing in answer to the prayers of two hundred and nineteen men. It was easy to preach, a very joy. Anybody could preach with such conditions. And what was the result? We received 1,100 into our church by conversion in three years, 600 of which were men. I do not see how the average preacher under average conditions preaches at all. Church members have much more to do than go to church as curious, idle spectators, to be amused and entertained. It is their business to pray mightily that the Holy Ghost will clothe the preacher and make his words like dynamite.⁴⁷

May God convict every church member, starting with the deacon, about the ultimate priority prayer is to have in relation to the spiritual health of the church.

By Providing For His Physical Needs

What does the pastor need physically? According to H. B. London, Jr., there are four “terrible” words that he constantly identifies as he works with pastors. These are isolation, loneliness, inadequacy, and insecurity. The latter word involves inadequate financial compensation, limited medical coverage, poor retirement benefits, and forced termination.⁴⁸ The deacon can help to eliminate each of these fears in the life of his pastor. Needs will vary according to the setting of the church and the circumstances of the pastor’s family, but each church can be gracious in providing emotional, physical, and financial support for their pastor.

If a church has a full-time pastor, they should be careful to meet his financial needs. This obligation becomes their responsibility before the Lord when they decide to

⁴⁷ John Maxwell, in a letter to church leaders, quoting A. M. Hills in *Pentecostal Light*, as cited by Schlafer, 138-39.

⁴⁸ H. B. London, Jr., “Being a Healthy Pastor In Unhealthy Times,” in *Growing Churches* (Spring 1995): 33-34.

call him full-time. The church should not expect his wife to work, including her salary as a part of his overall compensation. According to Scripture, it is God's ideal that the wife be able to stay at home, especially when children are involved. This frees her to care for her husband and children according to the New Testament standard. For instance, Titus 2:4-5 says, "*that they [the older women] admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, {5} to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.*" When the wife is forced to have another job outside the home, it causes her family to suffer. Paul says such circumstances violate biblical doctrine.

Likewise, the wife should not be expected to serve as the Associate Pastor. She should not be pressured into positions she does not feel comfortable filling. Also, she will not automatically be qualified to serve as the church's handyman or errand runner.

Finally, the church should do the best they can for this couple, protecting them, their marriage, and their children. It will be good for the deacon to meditate on these suggestions, asking God for help in trying to apply them. If he does, he will make an everlasting difference in the life of his pastor.

By Instigating Positive Change in the Church

Some churches need to implement a total change in the way they do church. This truth has been articulated by Coach Bill McCartney, founder of *Promise Keepers*:

Promise Keepers is seeking nothing less than a paradigm shift in the life of America's churches. Until now, in the vast majority of situations, pastors have not been honored, loved, esteemed, or prayed for. By God's grace, however, that is going to change as Promise Keepers in every

church see it as their personal responsibility to support the pastor. That's why I say we want a paradigm shift. A *paradigm* is a model, or pattern, for understanding and interpreting reality.

When there's a paradigm shift, everything gets changed. As Promise Keepers begin to honor and pray for their pastors, a new life and vitality will start to grow in congregations. A new teamwork will blossom between pastor and people. A new sense of call will dominate the pastors of this land. A new holiness will spring forth because of changed preaching. And we will find ourselves in the middle of revival.⁴⁹

The deacon can be a tremendous help in implementing the changes discussed in this section. It will be surprising to see how responsive a pastor is to someone he knows he can trust, someone who understands the biblical command to support the man of God.

Consequently, the prayer of Coach McCartney is a commendable one that any deacon should be proud to adopt as his own:

I see us going home to our churches and asking our pastors for permission, praying fervently for the favor of God, to stand before the congregation and say: "Things are going to change around here. We're going to start to lift up our pastor. We are going to pray around the clock! We're going to build this man up. We're going to take him where he has never been before." I see us exploding in our churches.⁵⁰

Application # 4 - The Ministry of Witnessing to the Lost

Regardless of one's calling or spiritual gifting, every Christian is to participate in Jesus' Great Commission to "make disciples" of all people (Matthew 28:18-20). This is especially true of those who hold an "office" in the church. The first deacons were involved in sharing the faith. All seven men may not have "preached" as Stephen and Philip did, but there is no doubt that they all were obedient to this Commission. No

⁴⁹ As cited by Schlafer, 140.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

matter what ministry the deacon might perform, it must have as its goal the building up of God's Kingdom. A person serving in the background can have a profound impact on Kingdom work. The aim of all Christian ministry is to see people born again, baptized, and nurtured in the Lord.

Every deacon should have the experience of leading someone to Christ. The New Testament teaches that every believer has been given the responsibility to share the faith. For example, 2 Corinthians 5:18 says, *"Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation."* Interestingly enough, the word for "ministry" used here is the same word used to designate the deacon--*diakonia*. Thus, to be a true "deacon" is to be involved in sharing the gospel. Leading someone to Christ will change the deacon's life forever. It will give him a new outlook and perspective on the purpose of the church.

When a deacon is involved in ministering to a person's physical needs, he has the ideal situation for sharing Christ. As Charles Spurgeon said, "If you want to give a hungry man a tract, wrap it around a sandwich." Similarly, John Maxwell has often shared, "People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care." Thus, due to the nature of the deacon's ministry, he will have opportune times for witnessing.

Maintaining a focus on evangelism will also promote harmony within the church. As one preacher put it, "I've never known a troublemaker in church who was a soul-winner." Thus, if the deacon is going to expend energy doing anything, let it be sharing the gospel--if he is going to contend for something, let it be the gospel of Jesus Christ (Jude 3, 4; Acts 6:8-7:60). Some men will fight over money, what color to paint the

fence, or just anything and everything. But God will not pass out rewards for such concerns. He will bless and reward those who keep their primary emphasis on spiritual things--not petty matters pertaining to this world. If a person is causing trouble in the church, he should repent and start witnessing to others. The most effective prescription for carnality is maintaining a proper focus on reaching the lost.

This maxim has proven to be true in each of the churches presented in *Chapter 12: Role Models in Deacon Ministry*. Not only are the Pastors of these churches soul-winners, but so are their Chairmen of Deacons--Jim Steenland (FBC Brownsville), Rhon Redwine (FBC Woodstock), and Edmund Whittaker (FBC Jacksonville). Because of the godly leadership provided by these men who focus on the Great Commission, each of their churches is serving together in harmony. It would be good to read the full interviews conducted with these men as given in *Appendix G*.

Any deacon who is willing can be a witness for his Lord. If he feels he lacks the knowledge necessary to lead someone to Christ, then several things can be done. First, he needs to make sure that he understands the gospel and the response he is to seek from others concerning the gospel. This means he should look to the Scriptures. For instance, Paul clearly explains the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4:

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, {2} by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you; unless you believed in vain. {3} For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, {4} and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures . . . [emphasis added].

Once a person understands the content of the gospel, then he has a responsibility to

respond to Jesus in a positive way. Specifically, the Bible says one is to come to Christ in repentance and faith. For example, Paul tells the Ephesian pastors,

You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you . . . testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ . . . [emphasis added]. *Acts 20:18, 21*

And, the preaching of Paul agrees with what Jesus Himself preached:

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel . . . [emphasis added]. *Mark 1:15*

Memorizing these verses would be a good start in witness training for the deacon.

Apart from this suggestion, a deacon should ask his pastor for help. He can also write out his personal testimony, putting it in a format that will be easy to share with others. Good training programs are also available that will provide a solid foundation for soul-winning. One such program is *Continuous Witness Training*, published by the Home Mission Board of the SBC. Periodically going through different training programs will allow the deacon to keep a fresh mind and learn new approaches.

Finally, the best way to learn how to witness is to go witness. Experience is always the best teacher. If the deacon has a heart for sharing his faith, he will have ample opportunities to do so with his family, neighbors, friends, and associates. Other occasions for witnessing will come through being involved in the ministries of his church. Such ministries might include Vacation Bible School, visitation, a bus ministry, the soup kitchen, a mission trip, or going to prisons, jails, hospitals, or nursing homes. Whatever the area of ministry, people always need to hear the Good News. To share Christ with others is to practice godly wisdom, because "*he who wins souls is wise*" (Proverbs 11:30).

Implementing a New Philosophy of Deacon Ministry

If a church realizes the fallacy of having a deacon board and wants to adopt a more biblical method, what should they do? How can new principles be implemented by the church? In response, the place to start is with the pastor. If he does not want change, then restructuring probably will not work. If the pastor wants change but the deacons do not, then a fight will likely occur. However, if both the pastor and deacons want this godly change, the following practical guidelines should help.

A Biblical Reevaluation

Associate Pastor Ken Smith of First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Georgia, recounts the process used by Pastor Johnny Hunt to help restructure their deacon ministry. Soon after arriving at Woodstock, he planned a weekend deacons's retreat. As the men gathered to pray and fellowship, Pastor Hunt had them list all the jobs and duties they were presently performing. After writing these functions on a large board, they began a systematic study of the Scriptures that deal with pastor-deacon roles. As they studied these passages, unscriptural duties were marked off the board. In the end, a majority of the "duties" they had been performing were erased because most had related to managing and overseeing the church. From this point on, they began to train, study the Bible, and focus more clearly on performing biblical deacon ministry. The results have been tremendous. Woodstock has gained over 4,000 new members in the past six years, the majority of them coming by conversion.⁵¹

⁵¹ Ken Smith, Associate Pastor, First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Georgia, interview by author, 25 September 1995, Woodstock, Georgia, tape recording.

Consistent Biblical Teaching

According to Pastor Kenny Lewis, First Baptist Church, Brownsville, Texas, his deacons are his dearest friends. He believes this closeness is due in large part to their church's acceptance of Scriptural authority concerning the roles of church officers. Jim Steenland, Chairman of Deacons, says this harmony did not always exist and when changes were made toward doing ministry, some men left. Thus, Pastor Lewis believes God's Word must be consistently taught to churches or conflict will continue. He states,

. . . my counsel and plea to every pastor would be to give himself to prayer and to the ministry of the Word and to insist on Scripture being the absolute authority--if he does this, it will work . . . If he will just be honest and open, and admit where he is failing and hurting, and if he will really major on developing men, really concentrate on discipling them, he will receive more benefit, encouragement and strength than in any other thing he does.⁵²

Exposure To Positive Role Models

It would probably be good for many churches' leaders to plan trips to other churches. Nothing will stimulate and nurture change like the excitement of seeing another growing, godly ministry in full swing. If the church cannot afford to travel, then books, films, and other resources might be purchased or borrowed. Leaders can also call growing churches and talk with them about their ministries. Reading the full interviews of the pastors and chairmen of deacons in *Appendix G* will be a helpful place to start.

Maintaining a Positive Attitude

Modifications that take place in the church should be handled with a positive

⁵² Kenny Lewis, interview by author.

attitude. Dr. Cliff Palmer, a longtime pastor and denominational leader, has suggested, “Sometimes it is not as much what we do as how we do it. The spirit and the attitude in which we do things is what determines the success. We are to preach the Word, rebuke, and these things, but it is always to be done with longsuffering. So attitude is very important in how we go about our leadership.”⁵³ Though it may not be possible to always walk in harmony with every church member, the admonition given in Hebrews should be remembered: “*Pursue peace with all people . . .*” (Hebrews 12:14a). Further, as Zerubbabel faced insurmountable odds when trying to finish the rebuilding of the temple, the Lord reminded him, “*This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts*” (Zechariah 4:6b). There should be a firm commitment to restoring the church to its biblical roots, but this determination should be anchored in God’s overriding sovereignty.

Allowing Appropriate Time

Lee Maxcy, business administrator at Second Baptist, Houston, has noted the need for time when making major changes. For instance, he states that Second Baptist’s deacons used to function as a board. After Dr. Ed Young began pastoring there, however, more emphasis was placed on ministry than overseeing. Through time, those men who did not have a heart for ministry either dropped out or moved on to other things. Now, seventeen years later, their deacon ministry is a great blessing to the church.

The men who presently serve are involved in numerous ministries. One of their

⁵³ Palmer, interview by author.

primary responsibilities is to help the 40 to 60 new members added weekly to become assimilated into the church. Also, they are also responsible for organizing the offertory, which is a massive job in this large church. In December, they set aside a week to serve Christmas dinners at the church. During this time, they prepare meals, groceries, toys, and other goods for a total of about 5,000 indigent people. In short, they now minister to people and help their church and its pastors in any way they are needed.⁵⁴

Dr. Tom Futrell, a pastor of almost thirty years and a Trustee on the Home Mission Board, has also recognized the need for churches to move away from the deacon board model. To promote this change, he encourages pastors to incorporate their deacons in ministry. When this happens, it will foster a loving fellowship in the church. For this process to work, however, he says that people must be given time to change:

This [being involved in ministry] elevates the position of deacon from the unscriptural *board of directors* to the position of *minister* along side the pastor. **Caution:** Sacred cow. Milk gently, don't slay.⁵⁵

Conclusion

No doubt there are considerable problems in the local church, especially in the area of deacon ministry. However, it does not have to be this way. When biblical principles govern what the church does, there will be spiritual healing and renewed vitality. But, there is no substitute for obedience to God's Word. Though tradition may be powerful, it

⁵⁴ Lee Maxcy, Business Administrator, Second Baptist Church, Houston, Texas, interview by writer, 19 October 1995, telephone conversation, tape recorded.

⁵⁵ Edward R. Futrell, "Principles of Church Growth: A Study in Nehemiah" (Johnson City, Tennessee: unpublished thesis, 1990), 37-38.

effects no eternal change--it hampers rather than enhances Kingdom work.

If deacon ministry is restored to its biblical roots, pastors will be blessed rather than opposed and people will be ministered to rather than ignored. Deacons are servants, not overseers, and their calling demands involvement in ministry. The particular areas of ministry will include mediation, caretaking, helping, and witnessing. The specific actions taken in each of these general areas of ministry will depend on the unique needs of the given church and its community. When these ministries are performed, the Holy Spirit will bless, guide, anoint, and fill the deacon making him a genuine *spiritual minister*.

PART TWO: TRENDS IN DEACON MINISTRY

SECTION I: HISTORICAL TRENDS IN DEACON MINISTRY

CHAPTER 7

THE DEACON MINISTRY

FROM THE EARLY CHURCH TO THE REFORMATION

*. . . For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.
1 Timothy 3:13*

Introduction

The diaconate has been interpreted in a variety of ways throughout the course of history. A summary of the major views from the time of the Early Church to the Reformation will be presented, based on a cursory look through these ages. This brief look at history will be divided into three major categories: (1) The First Five Centuries (A.D. 100-500), (2) The Middle Ages (500-1500), and (3) The Reformation (A.D. 1500-1600).

The Deacon Ministry During the First Five Centuries (A. D. 100-500)

Types of Ministry During the Early Church Period

The deacon ministry did not end with the New Testament church but was found flourishing in the practice of the Christian community even in the earliest ages. In the

beginning of the second century, Ignatius makes specific mention of deacons.¹ Other sources not only mention deacons but also provide ample information concerning the ministry they performed. The earliest records of deacon ministry in the church after the New Testament era indicate that deacons were involved in ministering to people, their pastors, and the overall cause of Christ.

Their Ministry to People

Deacons serving just after the turn of the first century were considered “agents of charity” who visited martyrs in prison, helped bury the dead, and encouraged those who had been excommunicated from the church. Further, they looked after the needs of widows, orphans, the sick, and others in distress.² One vivid example is given by eyewitnesses of a plague that swept through Alexandria in about A. D. 259. Their testimony indicates that the deacons “visited the sick fearlessly,” “ministered to them continually,” and “died with them most joyfully.”³

Their Ministry to Pastors

One of the most notable features of the deacons in the early church was their close

¹ J. W. Charley, “Deacon,” in *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, gen. ed. J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corp., 1978), 285. (Cited hereafter as *NIDCC*.)

² Charles W. Deweese, *The Emerging Role of Deacons* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1979), 12; G. W. H. Lampe, “Diakonia in the Early Church,” in *Service in Christ: Essays Presented to Karl Barth on his 80th Birthday*, eds. James I. McCord and T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1966), 58-61. (Hereafter cited as *Service in Christ*.)

³ Deweese, 12-13.

relationship with and faithful service to their pastors. The ministry offered to their pastors was extremely helpful. Two specific areas of help were commonly rendered: the carrying out of delegated duties and informing the pastor of needs among the flock.

Performing Tasks

Hippolytus wrote in about A. D. 215 in his early church manual, *Apostolic Traditions*, that one being ordained as a deacon is being ordained “to the service of the bishop, to do what is ordered by him.”⁴ Thus, the deacons would carry out the administrative duties delegated to them each day by the bishop (“Bishop,” as used in 1 Timothy 3:1 and Philippians 1:1 literally means “overseer,” and is given in the New Testament as one of the designations for the pastor). This gracious, dedicated, and voluntary service relieved their pastors of everyday tasks that would have otherwise hindered them in their ministry of the word and prayer. The specific kinds of ministry they performed included caring for the church, delivering messages, distributing funds to the needy and poor, helping with worship, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and helping to train new converts in the faith.⁵

Providing Information

A second way they helped their pastors was by informing them about the hurts of the flock. Ministry of this kind is also spoken of in the *Apostolic Traditions*. According

⁴ Geoffrey J. Cuming, *Hippolytus: A Text for Students* (Bramcote Notts: Grove Books, 1976), 13, as quoted in Alexander Strauch, *The New Testament Deacon: The Church’s Minister of Mercy* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth Pub., 1992), 161, n. 6.

⁵ Deweese, 12-14.

to J. W. Charley, Hippolytus' writings indicated that the deacon was the "bishop's link with the church."⁶ Also they were said to be "the bishop's ear, and eye, and mouth, and heart, and soul."⁷ Thus, as they worked with the people and became familiar with their financial, physical, spiritual, and disciplinary needs, deacons would be prepared to brief the pastor about the hurts of the flock.⁸

Their Ministry for the Cause of Christ

A final area of ministry performed by these deacons included defending the faith. Even in the face of persecution many deacons had a Stephen-like loyalty to the cross. This is well illustrated by the example of the deacon Habib. According to ancient history, Emperor Licinius decreed that everyone was to worship Zeus, the mythological god of the Greeks. Habib, however, continued privately to worship the true God of heaven along with other believers. He "ministered and read the Scriptures, and encouraged and strengthened many by his words, and admonished them to stand fast in the truth of their belief, and not to be afraid of the persecutors; and gave them directions."⁹ Habib stood strong, even to the point of death. He was killed for his allegiance to Christ during this

⁶ Charley, "Deacon," in *NIDCC*.

⁷ "Constitutions of the Holy Apostles," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols., eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (repr. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., n.d.), 7:416 as cited by Strauch, 161-62.

⁸ Deweese, 13.

⁹ *Martyrdom of Habib the Deacon* in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 8:690-695 as quoted by Deweese, 13.

time of trial.¹⁰

Types of Structures During the Early Church Period

The Structure in Rome

The position of the deacon within church structure was probably organized in various ways. The most influential structure, however, originated with Fabian, bishop of Rome (A.D. 236-250), when he divided the city into seven sections, with one of seven deacons in charge of each sector.¹¹ This organization set the standard for a small number of deacons to serve. The positive outcome in later years was the high degree of respect that was afforded to these few men for the courageous ministry they performed. The negative outcome, however, was that the office was elevated beyond proportion. The office came to be recognized as the most influential office in the church, and their role became one of overseeing the affairs of the church.

The Evolution of a Problematic Structure

In two separate councils in the fourth century, the issue of the role of deacons was addressed. First, at the Council of Arles in 314, reference is made to the possible haughtiness of deacons.¹² Then, at the Council of Nicea in 325, the issue of deacons

¹⁰ Deweese, 13.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Charley, "Deacon," in *NIDCC*.

overstepping their boundaries was specifically addressed.¹³ Likewise, several church fathers wrote concerning this problem. Ambrosiaster entitled one work, *On the Boastfulness of the Roman Deacons*, while Jerome expressed dismay in a letter sent to a friend: "I am told that someone has been mad enough to put deacons before presbyters, that is before bishops."¹⁴ Dr. James Barnett summarizes the situation in the following statement: "In the third century, the deacons seem often to have overshadowed the presbyters in their importance and influence."¹⁵

The Reaction to a Problematic Structure

The ministry of deacons during the years A.D. 100-600 was so influential that it is often referred to as the "Golden Age"¹⁶ of the deacon. However, it is evident that a ministry that started out according to a New Testament pattern and resulted in blessing on the church, later came to lose its moorings. It evolved out of perspective and began to function in a non-Biblical way. In response to this, the pendulum reversed. The first signs of this reversal were evident in the church councils mentioned above. Other measures

¹³ Strauch, 162. He also cites canon eighteen formulated at the Council of Nicea: ". . . let the deacons remain within their own bounds, knowing that they are the ministers of the bishop and the inferiors of the presbyters . . . And if, after this decree, any one shall refuse to obey, let him be deposed from the diaconate" ("The Seven Ecumenical Councils," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 14 vols., Second Series, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace [repr. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., n.d.] 14:38.)

¹⁴ "Letters," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 6:288 as quoted by Strauch, 162.

¹⁵ Dr. James M. Barnett, *The Diaconate, A Full and Equal Order* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), 67, quoted in Strauch, 162.

¹⁶ Strauch, 162.

were taken in the following centuries (as shown below) to redirect the deacon ministry away from overseeing, but those corrective measures still did not align deacons with ministry to people. Therefore, starting in the fourth century, the deacon ministry began to deteriorate.¹⁷ This unfolding became even more severe for various reasons in the following years. Both the church in the East (Greek Orthodox) and the church in the West (Roman Catholic) experienced a sharp decline in emphasis on the deacon ministry.

A Summary of the Deacon Ministry or the Early Church Era

To conclude, there is wisdom to be obtained from these lessons of history. Particularly, any ministry that will function according to its God-given purpose as seen in the New Testament will bring blessing and honor to the church. This is evident from the results produced by the deacon ministry in the Jerusalem church and the churches of the second and third century. However, it also provides evidence that a negative impact will result from any ministry functioning outside of its God-ordained perimeters. Biblical standards are to be followed in all areas of kingdom work.

The Deacon Ministry During the Middle Ages (A. D. 500-1500)

The decline in the deacon ministry that started in the third and fourth centuries dropped to an even more severe level during the Middle Ages. Though an exhaustive survey cannot be given, it will be helpful to note the more prominent reasons in both the Eastern and Western churches.

¹⁷ Ibid., 162-63; Dewese, 16.

The Decline in the Eastern Church

The deacon ministry in the East declined due to a shift in emphasis concerning the type service deacons were to render. Though the function of the deacon ministry had previously gravitated toward overseeing and away from ministry to people, the emphasis in the Eastern church became focused on various aspects of church worship.¹⁸ Though church worship was an important part of Christian service and deacon ministry, it was viewed as the only responsibility of the diaconate. Thus, the deacons were probably involved in such activities as taking the offering, serving communion, leading in prayers, reading Scripture, preparing candidates for baptism, and helping to keep order in the services.¹⁹ Though these were good ministries to perform, each of them was an activity limited to the worship service of the church. That is, they were ministries done at the church and apart from the everyday life of the congregation. Consequently, as the deacons continued to be less and less involved with charity toward people and practical ministries, the more their ministry declined.

The Decline in the Western Church

The decline of the deacon ministry in the West was also due, more than anything else, to a new job description granted to the office by the church.²⁰ Whereas in the New Testament and in the early church the deacon ministry was people oriented, during the

¹⁸ Deweese, 16.

¹⁹ Lampe, "Diakonia in the Early Church," in *Service in Christ*, 59-60.

²⁰ Deweese, 16-17.

Middle Ages it became a fully developed “stepping-stone to the priesthood.”²¹ That is, the office of deacon was merely a starting place for those who felt a call to the priesthood but had not yet progressed to that point. Thus, the diaconate became an office used for promotion and a training ground for preachers.²² The justification given for this structure was found in 1 Timothy 3:13, which was interpreted to mean that “a meritorious deacon ought normally to receive promotion to the presbyterate.”²³

A Summary of the Deacon Ministry During the Middle Ages

Several lessons may be learned by observing the practices of the Eastern and Western churches of the Middle Ages. Firstly, the church in the East ordained men simply to help in a church service. Though this may have been helpful, it is not a New Testament model. A person does not have to be ordained as a deacon to participate in a church service. There is no requirement in Scripture indicating that only ordained men can take up the offering or say a prayer. To limit the responsibility of deacons to this small service is to deny them their proper and more important role of meeting all kinds of needs.

Secondly, the church in the West seemed to pervert the office of deacon by merely designating it as a place of honor. However, the deacon ministry, if it is to bring glory to

²¹ Charley, “Deacon,” in *NIDCC*; Though it is hard to trace this practice to its beginning, Lampe notes that it is present in the *Apostolic Church Order* and was already becoming popular by the fourth century. He states, “Instead of being a highly important office in its own right, directly linked with that of the bishop, it gradually becomes a lower rung in a ladder of preferment, so that the deacon comes in time to be no more than an apprentice priest.” (Lampe, “Diakonia,” in *Service in Christ*, 61-62.)

²² Charley, “Deacon,” *NIDCC*.

²³ Lampe, “Diakonia in the Early Church,” in *Service in Christ*, 61-62.

God, has to be a ministry to people. It is not a position of honor or an office to be used for self advancement. A man is not to be ordained because he is well-liked, a strong leader, or a long-time resident of the church. He is set aside to perform a ministry in the church. Honor comes to him because of the service he is doing in the body of Christ.

Furthermore, even a faithful deacon who serves well and is highly respected can never be “promoted” to the office of an overseer or pastor. That requires a calling that can only come through the Holy Spirit. Though he does well, he is not to usurp that authority uniquely given by divine permission to the pastor. When a deacon ministry devolves to the low level of wanting to “run” things, it will not experience the blessing of God. The responsibility to oversee the church is not granted by God to men based on seniority or longevity or popularity but to those who have been called and gifted by the Holy Spirit to be pastors.

The Deacon Ministry During the Reformation (A. D. 1500-1600)

The Reformation was a time when men and women took a fresh look at the New Testament, as opposed to the traditions and practices of a dead and lifeless church, to find what Christ required of the church. Thus, it was not until the Reformation that an attempt was made to restore a Biblical perspective to the deacon ministry. According to Edward Hardy, the sixteenth century Reformers “saw no great similarity between the ceremonial or political diaconate of the sixteenth century and that which they found in the New Testament.”²⁴ Therefore, they challenged the ideas of the Middle Ages: specifically, that

²⁴ Edward R. Hardy, “Deacons in History and Practice,” *The Diaconate Now*, ed. Richard T. Nolan (Washington: Corpus Books, 1968), 26, as cited by Deweese, 19.

of limiting the role of the deacon to worship services and using the office of deacon as a stepping-stone to the priesthood.²⁵

The Perspectives of Martin Luther

Martin Luther (1483-1546) made an ardent attempt to restore to the office of deacon the Biblical idea of serving and ministering to people. In 1520, he wrote, "the diaconate is the ministry, not of reading the Gospel or the Epistle, as is the present practice, but of distributing the church's aid to the poor."²⁶ Likewise, he stressed that the office of the deacon was to be filled by laity, not by those aspiring to the priesthood. Luther further suggested that the congregation also have input in the selection process.²⁷ Since deacons ministered to people, as well as to pastors, it made sense that the men set apart should be well accepted by those persons to whom they would minister.

Accordingly, in the churches affiliated with Luther, the deacons were responsible for people-oriented ministry. This included collecting and distributing alms for the "deserving" poor.²⁸ The poor were to be personally known and visited by the deacons.

²⁵ Deweese, 19.

²⁶ Abdel Ross Wentz and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., *Luther's Works*, vol. 36 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 116, as quoted by Deweese, 19.

²⁷ James Atkinson, "Diakonia at the Time of the Reformation," in *Service for Christ*, 87.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 87-88. Atkinson describes the scrutiny deacons were to use in determining who was truly poor and who might really be a 'vagrant scrounger' or 'workshy.' For those fitting the latter category, he states: "help was given, but only at minimum levels with the maximum of good counsel!" Those poor due to their own sins were closely inspected to assure repentance and genuine reformation. Relatives were to help their own.

Those considered poor were the sick, orphans, widows, the aged, sick bread-winners, travelers, and women in childbirth and their midwives. Time was also spent with delinquents, prisoners, and, especially, the neglected young and orphans. For the latter group, many deacons raised tuition money to help the boys further their education and saw that the girls came to an honorable marriage.²⁹

The Perspectives of Martin Butzer (Bucer)

Martin Bucer participated in the Reformation mostly from Strasbourg, France. He also had a profound impact on John Calvin, and thus, the structure of the church in Switzerland, Scotland, and various other countries.³⁰ Bucer taught that the church had two offices and described their respective functions as follows:

We teach that the Holy Spirit has instituted two distinct grades in the ministry of the Church, one which consists of the superior pastors whom the Holy Spirit describes as overseers and elders to whom He entrusts the ministry of teaching, of the holy sacraments, and of Christian discipline, that is, the whole cure of souls. The other grade comprises the ministers who assist the others in the ministry of the cure of souls, and tending the flock of Christ and also zealously assisting the poor³¹ . . . which is committed to those called Deacons.³²

Since Bucer was an extensive writer, there is also ample information describing what he believed the duties of the deacon to be. First, reacting to the abuses of the Middle ages, he believed that many deacons did not know what they were to do: “few if any who

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ D. F. Wright, “Bucer (Butzer), Martin,” in *NIDCC*.

³¹ Basil Hall, “Diakonia in Martin Butzer,” in *Service in Christ*, 98.

³² Ibid., 97.

are Deacons . . . know what their office and function should be . . . they think that their only duty is to sing the Gospel and Epistle at Mass.”³³ Thus, Bucer believed deacons were not limited to merely taking part in worship services. Likewise, they were not simply to hold an office, but perform a ministry. He expressed concern about their neglect of ministry to others while they were preoccupied with “otiose and vain titles of dignity.”³⁴

Secondly, Bucer also described what deacons were to do. Initially, they were to care for the poor and the widows. This meant responsibility for helping to raise and distribute funds for those in need. In addition, they were to keep detailed and accurate records of the funds. Further, they were to determine who was poor and needy and who was not. This latter responsibility also included a role in administering church discipline. Those who were living a disorderly life at the expense of others were to be put out of the church until repentance was assured.³⁵

The deacons were also to render service and support to their pastor, as noted in the following statements: “Deacons are joined to the ministry of bishops and presbyters to minister to them”³⁶ and “they must aid and serve the Bishop and the Presbyters in all the discipline of Christ.”³⁷ Thus, Bucer recognized a distinct difference between the pastor and deacon in both their position and function. The deacon was not to oversee the pastor,

³³ Ibid., 98.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 98-99.

³⁶ Ibid., 98.

³⁷ Ibid., 99.

but to serve him. By serving him, they served their church. Conversely, It was the pastors who were to oversee their work. For instance, in the event of a controversy over the poor in the parish, Bucer states that the deacons should seek the advice of the pastor(s) so that, “all things should be done by authority of the Word of God.”³⁸ Therefore, though the deacons had been entrusted with a great segment of ministry, their responsibility was not one of absolute control. Their ministry was the church’s ministry and was to be performed, not in exclusive autonomy, but in an attitude of submission toward the pastor. Ultimate responsibility for overseeing the funds of the poor still came under the umbrella of the pastor and the church.

It is necessary to understand the context in which Bucer spoke, concerning the deacon’s relationship to the pastor, for an accurate assessment of what he meant. The whole jest of what the Reformers hoped to accomplish was to correct the abuses of power, influence, and corrupt doctrine of the Catholic church. Therefore, Bucer did not believe in having a Pope. Nevertheless, neither did he deny the clear precedent of Scripture concerning pastoral authority in the church. If the Reformation is studied, it is apparent that its major leaders did not reject this doctrine of the church.

The Perspectives of John Calvin

John Calvin (1509-1564) was a well-known Reformer, mostly working out of Geneva, Switzerland. The most influential writer of his day, he provided a popular theological explanation to the Reformation through his *Institutes of the Christian*

³⁸ Ibid., 100.

Religion. Concerning the offices of the church, Calvin had similar convictions to those of Luther. For example concerning the deacon ministry, he stated that, "Scripture specifically designates as deacons those whom the church has appointed to distribute alms and take care of the poor, and serve as stewards of the common chest of the poor."³⁹ Additionally, he says, "Here, then, is the kind of deacons the apostolic church had, and which we, after their example, should have."⁴⁰ In accordance with this underlying philosophy, the deacons ordained in the churches influenced by Calvin carried out two basic functions: distributing alms to the poor and caring for the sick.⁴¹ Hence, the true purpose of deacon ministry was emphasized for the first time in over a thousand years.

Further, deacons were definitely considered church officers, and even entrusted with certain monies in the church, but Calvin maintained a clear distinction in their order from that of elder or pastor.⁴² In his understanding of the New Testament, the pastor was to be afforded greater dignity, with his office being ranked before that of the deacon.⁴³ If this basic Biblical principle were understood and accepted in American churches today, no doubt the number of conflicts among leadership would decrease. Though all believers are

³⁹ John T. McNeill, ed., and Ford Lewis Battles, trans., *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2, "The Library of Christian Classics, XXI" (London: SCM Press, 1960), 1061, as cited by Deweese, 19.

⁴⁰ *Institutes*, 1062, as cited by Deweese, 19.

⁴¹ J. K. S. Reid, "Diakonia in the Thought of Calvin," in *Service in Christ*, 105-106; Deweese, 19.

⁴² Reid, "Diakonia in the Thought of Calvin," in *Service in Christ*, 107.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

equal in Christ, God has assigned different functions to each person. When the church decides to live by God's direction, harmony and unity will be fostered in its midst.

Another precept which followed from Calvin's basic study of Scripture concerned the number of deacons that would serve in the church. Calvin believed that the number 7 was determined in Acts 6 and was based on what the immediate situation required.⁴⁴ That is, those men were set apart for a specific need at a specific time and thus for a specific purpose. Consequently, there was no sacred reason that mandated a specific number of deacons in the church as Fabian (see above) had suggested. Thus, if Calvin were correct in his interpretation, the modern church would do well to heed the principles he derived from Scripture. Accordingly, most small churches would probably need less than seven deacons, whereas larger churches may need more than seven. In any case, the number would be based on present need, not on a specific number or tradition. Once again, the church at Jerusalem had at least twenty thousand members and required only seven men to meet the kind of needs that required a deacon's attention.

The Perspectives of Other Reformers

The Puritans

The Church of England (i.e., Anglican) originated as an attempt at reformation by King Henry VIII but ultimately resulted in a mix of Catholicism and Protestantism. Consequently, the Church had a formal written policy concerning deacons that was Biblically sound, but their practice was still less than desirable. For instance, the bishop's

⁴⁴ Ibid., 105.

charge at a deacon's ordination read: "And furthermore, it is his office, where provision is so made, to search for the sick, poor, and impotent people of the Parish to intimate their estates, names, and places where they dwell . . ." ⁴⁵ Though this sounded good in writing, the Anglican deacons continued to practice medieval Catholic customs. That is, they still used the office as a stepping stone to the priesthood. Accordingly, they only participated in worship services while leaving the actual ministry of the poor to the churchwardens. ⁴⁶

The Puritans (members of the Church of England who remained within the Church, but struggled to "purify" it), however, reacted strongly to this concept of deacon ministry. They believed the deacon, as described in the Prayer Book (i.e., that the office was an entry level position for those entering the priesthood), was a type "which never came from heaven." ⁴⁷ In the Bible, they contended, "it is evident that the office of deacon consisteth only in the oversight of the poor" ⁴⁸ and "the deacon's office is but to distribute the church's alms." ⁴⁹ Thus, the deacons were responsible for superintending the alms for the poor because of the deacons "special fitness is in merciful compassion of those in necessity and an upright and just conscience in (their) dealing." ⁵⁰ According to their *Directory of*

⁴⁵ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "The English Reformers and Diaconate," in *Service in Christ*, 113-14.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ *Seconde Parte of a Register* 1:130 as cited by George Yule, "The Puritans," in *Service in Christ*, 125.

⁴⁸ *Seconde Parte* 1:127, as cited by Yule, 125.

⁴⁹ *Seconde Parte* 1:170, as cited by Yule, 125.

⁵⁰ *Seconde Parte* 1:165-66, as cited by Yule, 125.

Government, though only one day was given to discussing this topic at the Westminster Assembly of Divines, at least three things were concluded regarding deacon ministry: (1) this was to be a perpetual ministry, (2) it was not their primary duty to preach and administer the sacraments, and (3) they were “to take special care in distributing to the necessities of the poor.”⁵¹

The Anabaptists

During the Reformation, the Anabaptists were a non-conformist group springing up outside the bounds of both the Catholic and Anglican churches. They were divided into two major sectors. In Eastern Europe, settling mostly in Moravia and Transylvania,⁵² they came to be called Hutterites (after Jacob Huter).⁵³ This sector was persecuted almost to the point of extinction. In Western Europe, primarily working out of the Netherlands, they became known as the Mennonites (after the Dutchman, Menno Simons).⁵⁴ Though autonomous in practice and belief, they held a common doctrine which was primary to their beliefs--Holy Scripture was to be the only rule of faith.⁵⁵ The authority of Church tradition was therefore rejected.

⁵¹ “Deacons,” in *Form of Church Government* (n.p.), as cited by Yule, 126.

⁵² Deweese, 20.

⁵³ W. J. McGlothlin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1911; Copyright 1911 by A. J. Rowland, Secretary), 24.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge: The Judson Press, 1969), 11.

The Anabaptists had a tremendous influence on Christian thought. This was true even of their teachings concerning the function and role of the deacon. It has been stated that “the early Anabaptist-Mennonite movement universally established the office of deacon as an important ordained office.”⁵⁶ This influence extended to other Baptists and their forerunners with traces of their views being reflected in later confessions of the English Separatists and the General and Particular Baptists of England.⁵⁷

One early Anabaptist confession of faith entitled *A Brief Confession of the Principal Articles of the Christian Faith*⁵⁸ appeared in about 1580 among the Mennonites in northern Holland.⁵⁹ It was penned by Hans de Ries and Lubbert Gerrits, the pastors with whom John Smyth (pastor of the earliest Baptist church on record in modern history) would later work.⁶⁰ This document mentions deacons specifically in Article XXVI when it states, “not everyone is for that reason a teacher, bishop, or deacon . . . but those only

⁵⁶ Cited by Deweese, 20.

⁵⁷ Anabaptists (especially the Dutch Mennonites) seemed to have had a significant influence on John Smyth, the founder of the English General Baptists. For further study on this position, see William R. Estep, “Anabaptists and the Rise of English Baptists,” *The Quarterly Review* (October-December, 1968; January-March, 1969) and *The Anabaptist Story* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1963.). The English Separatists were also influenced by the Anabaptists and later gave birth to the Particular Baptists in England. For an overview of the various opinions on Baptist history in this era, see H. Leon McBeth’s chapter, “Baptist Beginnings,” in his book, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 21-63.

⁵⁸ This confession is sometimes referred to as “The Waterland Confession.”

⁵⁹ McGlothlin, 24-25.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

who have been set apart to those ministries."⁶¹ Further, the congregation was to have a part in this selection, as shown in Article XXVII:

Calling or election to the aforesaid ministries is accomplished through the ministers of the church and its members conjointly (a), and by invocation of the name of God: for God alone knows hearts, walks in the midst of the believers (b), who are congregated in his name, and through his Holy Spirit directs their intellects and minds so that through them he manifests and calls forth such as he knows will be useful to his church. [a. Acts 1:21; 14:2 b. Matt. 18:19-20]⁶²

Finally, they stated in Article XXVIII that it was to be the pastors (or elders), in accordance with Acts 6:6, who would give the final and formal approval to the selection through the laying on of hands:

But although the election and call aforesaid are accomplished in the method [aforesaid], yet confirmation in the ministry itself is performed by the elders of the people in the presence of the church (a) and that for the most part by the imposition of hands. [a. Acts 6:6; 13:3; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim 1:7]⁶³

Two other ways in which deacons functioned within early Anabaptist life are illustrated in history. In 1537, the Hutterite Ulrich Stadler spoke for the responsibility of deacons to render church discipline.⁶⁴ Additionally, a deacon by the name of Jan Pauw was a staunch defender of the faith at Amsterdam in the Netherlands. On March 6, 1535, he was martyred for his faith in Christ.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Ibid., 40.

⁶² Ibid., 40-41.

⁶³ Ibid., 41.

⁶⁴ Deweese, 20.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

A later writing of the Mennonites *The Dordrecht Confession* (1632), became their most popular and enduring confession.⁶⁶ This document has been adopted by numerous Mennonite groups, including some in America. Article 9 of this confession provides a more lengthy treatment on the subject of church officers.

First of all, since Christ had commanded that the church have offices, it was considered impossible to function properly without them. Christ Himself was to be taken as the primary example, in that He was the “great Shepherd, and Bishop of our souls.”⁶⁷ Further, He left the church, “before His departure” with “faithful ministers, apostles, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, whom He had chosen by prayer and supplication through the Holy Spirit, so that they might govern the church, feed His flock, watch over, maintain, and care for the same . . .”⁶⁸

Furthermore, since pastors were to oversee the local church, it was their responsibility to ensure a sufficient number of deacons were available in each local church. Thus, the *Confession* states, “That they should also take good care (particularly each one of the charge over which he had the oversight), that all the circuits should be well provided with deacons . . .”⁶⁹ Among these were to be “honorable old widows” set aside as “deaconesses” in order to care for the poor, sick, needy, and widowed.⁷⁰ The deacon

⁶⁶ Lumpkin, 66.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 72.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 73.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

was one “who should have the care and oversight of the poor, and who were to receive gifts and alms, and again faithfully distribute them among the poor saints who were in need, and this is in all honesty, as is becoming.”⁷¹ Deacons could also help in sharing the word and doctrine when it was needful to relieve the bishops.⁷² Finally, deacons were encouraged to be faithful servants to each member of the church,

. . . so that each one may serve the other from love, with the gift which he has received from the Lord; so that through the common service and assistance of each member, according to his ability, the body of Christ may be edified, and the Lord’s vineyard and church be preserved in its growth and structure.⁷³

The English Separatists

The English Separatists (members of the Church of England who believed real reformation could only take place by completely “separating” from the Church) also readily accepted the validity of the deacon ministry. The “Separatists” are often considered the forerunners of English Particular Baptists, with many of their leaders actually becoming Baptists.⁷⁴

One such man, Henry Barrow, became a primary leader for this group between 1585 and 1593. He wrote that deacons were to be responsible for gathering and

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 73.

⁷⁴ See McBeth, 49-52.

distributing food and necessities for the poor and needy.⁷⁵ He suggested it was also important for them to make sure that officers of the church were well cared for.⁷⁶

Barrow also addressed Anglican misconceptions concerning the role of the deacon. Specifically, he refuted the notion propagated by the bishop of Winchester that deacons had a right to govern the church. Realizing the contradiction between this view and the one presented in the New Testament, Barrow clearly articulated the Biblical position: “the deacon’s office in the church is to gather and distribute.”⁷⁷

A Summary of the Deacon Ministry During the Reformation

In summary, it may be said that the Reformers restored a significant value to the deacon ministry by elevating it back to the position of service and ministry to people. The ways in which the deacons functioned in the various churches might have differed slightly, but the principle of service to people was the correcting and bonding agent common to them all. The most important point, however, is that the Reformers and their churches not only talked about service but also practiced it. They did not stop until ministry was a part of the every day life of the church. Therefore, the modern deacon should be convinced that ministry is not true ministry unless two conditions are met: (1) True ministry means actually being involved in service, not just holding a position; and (2) True ministry means

⁷⁵ Deweese, 20.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Leland H. Carlson, ed., *The Writings of Henry Barrow, 1587-1590*, “Elizabethan Nonconformist Texts, III” (London; George Allen and Unwin, 1962), 219, 609, as cited by Deweese, 20.

ministering to people, not doing jobs around the church or overseeing the church's business.

Furthermore, the Reformation fathers did not deny pastoral authority although they saw the fallacies of the papacy of their day. To clearly explicate this point for deacons and the church today, the following reasons for refusing to accept the leadership of a pastor will be presented: (1) If he starts having numerous illegitimate children, (2) If he attempts to sell a member one of St. Peter's bone chips for an exorbitant amount of money (with the understanding that if he refuses his salvation will be forfeited, resulting in eternal damnation), or (3) If he demands a member kiss all steps leading to the front door of the church or denominational building to keep from suffering in purgatory when they die. Although one may laugh at such nonsense, these were exactly the types of problems in the church at the time of Luther and Bucer.⁷⁸ Therefore, when these actions and demands characterize a person's pastor, the church should follow the Reformer's lead and seek a new pastor.

⁷⁸ Due to the requirement for priests to remain celibate, many of them became immoral and fathered illegitimate children. In order to raise money for the church and its causes, indulgences were sold. Indulgences were things done (i.e., chant, repeat prayers or the names of saints) or things bought (i.e., statutes, crosses, etc.) that supposedly caused one to have peace with God. When one indulged in indulgences, it caused one to draw upon the surplus merits of Christ, the Virgin Mary, or one of the Saints. This was important, since no person on their own could do enough good works to avoid purgatory (See Robert G. Clouse, "Indulgences," in *NIDCC*).

One could acquire these surplus merits, then, through indulgences. Thus, if one could purchase a bone or strand of hair (supposedly from the body of Peter, Paul, etc.) he was unquestionably ensured his salvation. This type of complete abuse, exercised at the permission of the pope himself, led Luther to initiate reform. According to Robert D. Linder, "the sale of indulgences near his [Luther's] parish at Wittenberg [was] the precipitating event" that provoked Luther to action, thus birthing the official Reformation (Robert D. Linder, "Reformation, The," in *NIDCC*).

It was gross abuses of this type then, not merely strong pastoral leadership, that set the context for the Reformers seeking new leadership. If a person desires to see their pastor resign simply because he preached a sermon on sin, or refused to perform a marriage ceremony for their cousin, or did not visit their aunt Nellie as often as she wanted, then that person, not their pastor, is out of God's will. This type of attitude equates the office of pastor with that of a hireling, merely hiring and firing at will, hoping to satisfy personal whims and fancy. The Reformers spoke out concerning flagrant abuses of power, but not against Biblical pastoral authority (see, for instance, 1 Timothy 3:1; Philippians 1:1; Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24).

CHAPTER 8

THE DEACON MINISTRY IN BAPTIST LIFE

*... For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.
1 Timothy 3:13*

The story of Baptist deacons can be traced to seventeenth century Europe. That is where the first clearly identifiable Baptist church of modern history was founded in 1609. Thus, the chronicles of deacon ministry in Baptist life are as far-reaching as Baptist life itself, spanning nearly four hundred years of service. A survey of how this ministry has been practiced will be divided into two sections: (1) Deacon Ministry Among Baptists in Europe and (2) Deacon Ministry Among Baptists in America.

Deacon Ministry Among Baptists in Europe

The earliest Baptist churches on record began to appear in the early 1600's in Europe. During this time, Baptists emerged in two major groups: (1) General Baptists (those who believed that Christ died for all, and thus, in a "general" atonement) and (2) Particular Baptists (those who believed that Christ died only for the elect, and thus, in a "particular" atonement).¹ Each of these groups emerged from similar, yet separate and

¹ W. J. McGlothlin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1911; Copyright 1911 by A. J. Rowland, Secretary), 50.

distinct, backgrounds.² In order to fully understand Baptist history, then, it is important to consider the formation and teachings of each.

The English General Baptists of the 1600's

John Smyth and the First Baptist Church, 1609

The General Baptists of Europe are the first Baptist churches on record in modern history. These churches date back to 1609 when their founder John Smyth established a Baptist church in the Netherlands.³ Smyth had been educated at Cambridge University, and, for some time, taught there as a professor.⁴ In 1594 he was ordained as an Anglican priest by the Bishop of London.⁵ Being ordained, he served as “city lecturer” (preacher)⁶ at Lincoln but became convinced of Separatist ideas, openly addressed the sins of prominent leaders, and spoke harshly of the Church of England.⁷ Due to his nonconformity, he was first imprisoned in the “Clink,” and later, in approximately 1602,

² H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 39.

³ William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge: The Judson Press, 1969), 97-99; McGlothlin, 51-52; McBeth, 32-37.

⁴ McBeth, 32.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Lumpkin, 97-98.

⁷ William T. Whitley, ed., *The Works of John Smyth*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: University Press, 1915), 1:xliv, as cited by McBeth, 32-33.

was dismissed from his post.⁸ Around 1606 or 1607, he and a group of Puritans in the diocese of Lincoln decided to meet separately from the mother Church.⁹ Though they maintained their membership in the Church, they were nonetheless persecuted for their views.¹⁰

This persecution finally led them to separate completely from the Anglican church.¹¹ For safety and convenience, these believers eventually divided into two groups.¹² One group, led by Smyth and Thomas Helwys (a wealthy layman¹³), met in Gainsborough.¹⁴ The other group, led by Richard Clifton, was later led by John Robinson, and met at Scrooby.¹⁵ Ultimately, further persecution led both parties to flee to the Netherlands.¹⁶ Robinson and his followers, after a short stay in Amsterdam, moved on to Leyden in April, 1609.¹⁷ Part of this group sailed for America in 1620 on the *Mayflower*, later becoming the nucleus of both the Pilgrim Fathers and the Congregational Church in

⁸ Daniel Neal, *The History of the Puritans*, 4 vols. (London: Richard Hett, 1732-1738), 1:108, as cited by McBeth, 33.

⁹ Lumpkin, 97.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² McBeth, 33; Lumpkin, 97.

¹³ McBeth, 33.

¹⁴ Lumpkin, 97-98.

¹⁵ Ibid., 97.

¹⁶ Ibid., 98.

¹⁷ Ibid.

New England.¹⁸ Smyth and his church stayed in Holland.

While Smyth was in Amsterdam, he had contact with both the Mennonites and a Separatist church (called the “Johnson Church” or the “Ancient Church”).¹⁹ This Separatist church had been founded by a number of leaders, including Francis Johnson, after whom the church was named. The “Johnson church” had moved from England in about 1595, also due to persecution by the state church.²⁰

Although the “Ancient church” had desires for reform, Smyth disagreed with how they had progressed. Firstly, they had no clear convictions that church membership should only be comprised of believers. Secondly, they had not fully adopted congregational polity. Finally, Smyth (probably being influenced by the Mennonites and his own study of the Scriptures) was convicted that infants should not be baptized. Baptism, he believed, was for believers only. Following these beliefs, Smyth and his followers participated in believer’s baptism in 1609. Hence, they cut themselves off from the other Separatist groups and founded the first Baptist church on record in modern history.²¹

While still in Amsterdam, and after becoming a Baptist, Smyth and his followers became even more closely acquainted with the Dutch Mennonites. In fact, he and some of his church members sought to join their communion. Because of the changes they were making, and in order to provide a sound basis for what they believed, Smyth penned a

¹⁸ Lumpkin, 98; McBeth, 30, 34.

¹⁹ Lumpkin, 98-99; McGlothlin, 52.

²⁰ Lumpkin, 80-81.

²¹ Ibid., 98-99.

brief confession in 1609 entitled *Short Confession of Faith in XX Articles by John Smyth*.²² Though this is a short confession, it did not neglect to mention the church officers which included deacons. Article XVI reads,

That the ministers of the church are, not only bishops (“Episcopos”), to whom the power is given of dispensing both the word and the sacraments, but also deacons, men and widows, who attend to the affairs of the poor and sick brethren.²³

To gain further insight into his views on this subject, it is helpful to consider his writings regarding the deacon ministry just prior to this confession. As early as 1607, Smyth (while still a Separatist) wrote that the chief duty of deacons was to ensure that “none of the Saints want bodily necessities, and that due provision be made for holy things and persons.”²⁴ Further, it was their duty to disperse church monies to orphans, widows, poor people, and others in need.²⁵ As for the female deacons (or widows), they were “to visit and relieve the widow, fatherless, sick, lame, blind, impotent, women with children, and diseased members of the church.”²⁶ Thus, the earliest of all Baptist confessions mentions the ministry of the deacon.

Later, while still awaiting acceptance by the Mennonites, John Symth and forty-one other English signed a thirty-eight article confession *A Short Confession of Faith*

²² Ibid., 99.

²³ Ibid., 101.

²⁴ Whitley, 1:260-61, as cited by Charles W. Deweese, *The Emerging Role of Deacons* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1979), 20. Cited hereafter as Deweese, *Emerging Role*.

²⁵ Whitley, 1:316-320, as cited by Deweese, *Emerging Role*, 21.

²⁶ Whitley, 1:261, as cited by Deweese, *Emerging Role*, 20-21.

drawn up by the Mennonites in 1610.²⁷ This confession was almost identical to the one written by de Ries and Gerrits in 1580 (see above).²⁸ It recognized the office of deacon, indicating that those set aside were to be chosen by God and elected and ordained by the church in which they would serve.²⁹

A final confession, which probably reflects the latest thoughts of Smyth, although published by his party after his death in 1612, was *Propositions and Conclusions concerning True Christian Religion, containing a Confession of Faith of certain English people, living at Amsterdam*.³⁰ This document states in Article 76,

That Christ hath set in His outward church two sorts of minister: viz., some who are called pastors, teachers or elders, who administer in the word and sacraments, and others who are called Deacons, men and women: whose ministry is, to serve tables and wash the saints' feet (Acts vi. 2-4; Phil. i. I; I Tim. iii. 2, 3, 8, II, and chap. v.)³¹

Thus, the first Baptists on record consistently recognized the office of deacon and considered their primary function one of serving and ministering to the needs of people.

Thomas Helwys and the First English Baptist Church, 1611

Although Smyth had attempted to join the Mennonites, not all of his church agreed

²⁷ McGlothlin, 54.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Lumpkin, 108-109.

³⁰ McGlothlin, 66.

³¹ Ibid., 80.

with this decision.³² Among those who respectfully disagreed was Thomas Helwys, who, along with others from the Smyth church, returned to Spitalfield, England.³³ There, in 1611, they founded what many consider to be the earliest Baptist church on English soil.³⁴ Helwys was also responsible for penning a confession, in the name of his church,³⁵ just before leaving Holland.³⁶ It is entitled *A Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam in Holland (1611)* and consists of twenty-seven articles.³⁷ Articles Sixteen and Twenty through Twenty-two address the topic of church officers. These articles spoke of Elders and Deacons as follows:

(16) . . . And especiallie the Elders ought to knowe the whole flock, wereoff the HOLIE GHOST hath made them overseers. Acts 20.28; 1 Pet. 5.2, 3. And therefore a Church ought not to consist off such a multitude as cannot have particuler knowledg one off another.

(20) That the Officers off everie Church or congregation are either Elders who by their office do especially feed the flock concerning their soules, Act. 20.28, Pet 5.2, 3. or Deacons Men, and Women who by their office releave the necessities off the poore and impotent brethre` concerning their bodies, Act. 6.1-4.

(21) That these Officers are to bee chosen when there are persons qualified according to the rules in Christs Testament, 1 Tim. 3.2-7. Tit. 1.6-9. Act. 6.3. 4. By Election and approbacion off that Church or congregacion whereoff they are members, Act. 6.3. 4. and 14.23, with Fasting, Prayer, and Laying on off hands, Act. 13.3. and 14.23. And there being but one rule for Elders, therefore but one sort off Elders.

³² Ibid., 53; Lumpkin, 99.

³³ McBeth, 38.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Lumpkin, 114-115.

³⁶ McGlothlin, 53; Deweese, *Emerging Role*, 25.

³⁷ Lumpkin, 114-115.

(22) That the Officers off everie Church or congregacion are tied by Office onely to that particuler congregacion whereoff they are chosen, Act. 14.23, and 20.17. Tit. 1.5. And therefore they cannot challeng by office anie auctoritie in anie other congregacion whatsoever except they would have an Apostleship.³⁸

The Faith and Practice of Thirty Congregations, 1651

Later in 1651, the first confession produced by a group of General Baptists, *The Faith and Practise of Thirty Congregations, Gathered According to the Primitive Pattern*, was written by two representatives from each of the churches in and around Leicestershire and Lincolnshire.³⁹ This confession does not use the specific terms for church officers such as elder, pastor, or deacon, etc. It does, however, give a description in Articles Fifty-eight through Sixty-six of the duties for two sets of servants. The first set included those who “labor in the Word of God” (Eph. 4:11, etc.).⁴⁰ The second set of servants were described as those who are,

suteably qualified, to oversee, or order the affairs concerning the poor distressed members of Christ, that they may not be neglected, and so perish for want of food and rayment, and to take off that work from lying too heavy upon the care of those which labour in the word and doctrine; Acts. 6. 3, 4.⁴¹

Further, the church was “to judge those men” being set aside for both positions to ensure

³⁸ McGlothlin, 90-91.

³⁹ Ibid., 94; Lumpkin, 172.

⁴⁰ McGlothlin, 105-106.

⁴¹ Ibid., 106.

that they lived godly lives.⁴²

The Standard Confession, 1660

A second confession which was produced by a group of General Baptists was *The Standard Confession of 1660*. It was later reaffirmed (and slightly revised) by the General Assembly of the General Baptists of England in 1663, 1678, 1691, 1697, and 1704.⁴³

According to the introductory material, this 1660 confession was subscribed to “by certain Elders, Deacons, and Brethren.”⁴⁴ Article Twenty-five states, “that the Elders or Pastors which God hath appointed to oversee, and feed his Church . . . and [are] ordained to office . . . are to feed the flock with meat in due season, and in much love to rule over them, with all care, seeking after such as go astray . . .”⁴⁵ The office of deacon was to function on behalf of the poor. Article Nineteen states,

That the poor Saints belonging to the Church of Christ, are to be sufficiently provided for by the Churches, that they neither want food or rayment, and this by a free and voluntary contribution on, (and not of necessity, or by the constraint or power of the Magistrate) 2 Cor. 9.7. 1 Cor. 8.11, 12, and this through the free and voluntary help of the Deacons, (called Overseers of the poor) being faithful men, chosen by the Church, and ordained by Prayer and Laying on of Hands, to that Work, Acts 6. 1, 2. 3, 4, 5, 6. So that ther is no need in the Church Christ, of a Magesterial compulsion in this case . . .⁴⁶

⁴² Ibid., 106-107.

⁴³ Ibid., 109-110.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 111.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 116-17.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 117-18.

The Orthodox Creed, 1678

A third confession to be considered, *The Orthodox Creed, 1678*, is likely the most complete of all the General Baptist confessions.⁴⁷ It states in Article Thirty-one that there are three officers of the church, “Bishops, or Messengers (Or overseer, or shepherd); and Elders, or Pastors; and Deacons, or Overseers of the poor.”⁴⁸ Further, “The deacons are in like manner to be chosen by election and ordination, and are in their particular congregations, to receive the charity and free benevolence of the people.”⁴⁹

The True Gospel-Faith Declared According to the Scriptures, 1654

A final, and not so well-known, General Baptist confession is *The True Gospel-Faith*, which appeared in 1654. It was apparently penned by Thomas Lover, a General Baptist leader and later circulated by John Griffith and others as a response to rising Quakerism. This is a short confession and does not mention deacons by name. However, Acts 6:3 is listed as Scriptural support for Article XXII which lists church officers. Likewise, Acts 6:6 is listed as support in Article XXIII describing the acceptable practice

⁴⁷ McBeth, 67.

⁴⁸ McGlothlin, 146. McBeth, 78-79, indicates that the “Messenger” functioned in some ways as an area bishop working with a group of churches and in some respects as a modern day “home missionary.” Whereas the Pastors and Deacons were “tyed” to a local church, the “Messenger” had freedom to interact with several churches. However, all three positions were elected by the people at the “common suffrage of the church” (Article XXXI, “Of Officers in the Church of Christ,” *The Orthodox Creed, 1678* as given in McGlothlin, 146-47).

⁴⁹ McGlothlin, 147.

of fasting, praying, and the laying on of hands when choosing church officers.⁵⁰

Presumably, this confession would allow for the office of deacon, as did other General Baptist confessions.

Minutes of the General Assembly of General Baptists, 1697

One other source for gleaning ideas of the General Baptists concerning deacons comes from the minutes of the General Assembly of General Baptists in 1697. It was stated that deacons were responsible for gathering church monies for the poor. Herein, they were to keep records of any member who was “short” in giving, and likewise, should “Admonish to more Liberalitie” that “there may be an Equallity in performance of that great Duty.”⁵¹

The English Particular Baptists of the 1600's

Henry Jacob and the JLJ Church

Particular Baptists were birthed out of the Separatist movement during the decade of 1630-1640, about a generation after the General Baptists.⁵² The first of these Baptists churches were started in England, rather than the Netherlands.⁵³ However, Henry Jacob, who started a Separatist church in 1616 (later to be known as the JLJ Church) in the

⁵⁰ Lumpkin, 188-195.

⁵¹ Deweese, *Emerging Role*, 26.

⁵² Lumpkin, 143.

⁵³ McGlothlin, 168.

Southwark section of London, had spent time in exile in Holland.⁵⁴ Jacob never became a Baptist himself, but it was from this JLJ Church that the first Particular Baptists did arise. Evidently, he held a more moderate Separatism, not wanting to actually break with the mother church of England.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Jacob did, as an influencer of these early Baptists, express his beliefs in the office of deacon. In one document that he helped develop and edit, *A third humble Supplication (1605)*, it is stated that his party wished

to Assemble together somewhere publickly to the Service & worship of God, to vse & enjoye peaceable among our selves alone the wholl exercyse of Gods worship and of Church government viz. by a Pastor, Elder & Deacons in our severall Assemblies without any tradicion of men whatsoever, according to the specification of Gods written word and no otherwise . . .⁵⁶

John Spilsbury and the First Particular Baptist Church, 1638

Jacob pastored the JLJ Church for several years before turning the church over to John Lathrop. During Lathrop's tenure, new members with stronger Separatist sentiments joined the congregation. Because of disagreements over infant baptism and other doctrines, a Mr. Dupper and several others broke with the congregation to form a new Separatist church. The JLJ church split again in 1633, due to its large size and disagreement over the validity of the Anglican church. This new church was led by

⁵⁴ McBeth, 30-31. Though there is no solid evidence (McGlothlin, 168) that Jacob was influenced by Anabaptists, it is hard to imagine that he lived in the midst of these people without coming into contact with them and their ideas (see McBeth, 31).

⁵⁵ McBeth, 40-41.

⁵⁶ Champlin Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters in Light of Recent Research*, 2 vols (New York: Russell and Russell, 1967. First published 1912.), 1:80 as cited by McBeth, 119.

Samuel Eaton.⁵⁷

In 1637 Henry Jessey became pastor of the JLJ Church, and soon after, six more members left due to their convictions regarding believer's baptism. These members joined with John Spilsbury (who either had succeeded Eaton of the 1633 group or had formed a new group) and had a definite conviction concerning baptism for believers only. Thus, at least by 1638, there was a definite Particular Baptist church founded in London. By 1644 at least seven Particular Baptist churches had formed. This group of seven produced a confession of faith which spoke definitely of the office of deacon. This confession has been one of the most influential confessions ever drawn by Baptists.⁵⁸

The First London Confession, 1644

John Spilsbury, the founder of the first Particular Baptist church, was probably the major contributor to the *First London Confession*.⁵⁹ This confession speaks specifically of deacons even though not much detail is given concerning their function. The deacon is put among the whole cluster of church offices without distinction. Article XXXVI of the *Confession* reads,

every Church has power given them from Christ for their better well-being, to choose to themselves meet persons into the office of Pastors, Teachers (a), Elders, Deacons, being qualified according to the Word, as those which Christ has appointed in his Testament, for the feeding, governing,

⁵⁷ McBeth, 42-44; Lumpkin, 143-44; McGlothlin, 168-170.

⁵⁸ McBeth, 42-44; Lumpkin, 143-52; McGlothlin, 168-170.

⁵⁹ Lumpkin, 145ff.

serving, and building up of his Church . . .⁶⁰

This confession apparently focuses more on “Pastors” with the two following Articles making reference to the “Ministers aforesaid.” These “Ministers aforesaid” are to “feed the flock of Christ committed to them, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.”

Likewise, the “Officers aforesaid” could be paid by the church in that “they that preach the Gospel, should live on the Gospel.”⁶¹ Thus, deacons are mentioned, but it is inconclusive as to what their function was to be.

The Somerset Confession, 1656

The Somerset Confession was probably written by Thomas Collier for the Particular Baptist churches in the Western Association of western England.⁶² This confession does not mention deacons by name and groups all that are to be ordained into one category in Article XXXI.⁶³ Once again, Acts 6:3 is included in the Scriptures listed as support texts. Like *The First London Confession*, more emphasis is placed on the preaching ministry than any other. It suggests in Article XXXII that those “labouring in the word and doctrine” are worthy of pay (1 Cor. 9:4, 7; 1 Tim. 5:17, 18) and, in Article XXXIII, that an “orderly ministry in his [Christ’s] church” should be “submitted unto”

⁶⁰ McGlothlin, 184; Lumpkin, 166.

⁶¹ McGlothlin, 184-85; Lumpkin, 166-67.

⁶² Lumpkin, 200-202; McGlothlin, 201. Though Collier was a Particular Baptist spokesman, he only held to moderate Calvinism. It appears that this confession was both an attempt to check the rigid Calvinism of some of the London churches and, at the same time, somewhat unite the Particular and General Baptists in and around Somerset county.

⁶³ Lumpkin, 212; McGlothlin, 211.

(Heb. 13:17; 2 Thes. 3:14).⁶⁴ Therefore, the confession sheds little light on the ministry of the deacon though it is highly probable that the office was recognized by the churches.

The Second London Confession, 1677

This *Second London Confession* was written, circulated, and signed by a number of Particular Baptists in 1677.⁶⁵ This confession is more complete than previous ones and is probably a Baptist revision of the Westminster Confession of 1646.⁶⁶ The confession was revised in 1688 and then approved by the first General Assembly of Particular Baptists in 1689,⁶⁷ being signed by “Ministers” and “Messangers” from over one hundred churches in England and Wales.⁶⁸ Later, new additions appeared in 1693, 1699, 1719, 1720, 1791, and 1809.⁶⁹ This confession was revised in 1697 by Benjamin and Elias Keach for their churches and later became a major influence among American Baptists.⁷⁰

The *Second London Confession* specifically mentioned deacons as church officers but still did not elaborate on their function. Chapter XXVI, section 8, states,

A particular Church gathered, and compleatly Organized, according to the mind of Christ, consists of Officers, and Members; And the Officers

⁶⁴ Lumpkin, 212; McGlothlin, 211.

⁶⁵ Lumpkin, 236.

⁶⁶ Lumpkin, 236; McGlothlin, 216.

⁶⁷ Lumpkin, 238. For the occasion of this confession, see Lumpkin, 235-240, and McGlothlin, 215-219.

⁶⁸ Lumpkin, 238-39; McGlothlin, 218.

⁶⁹ Lumpkin, 239; McGlothlin, 219.

⁷⁰ Lumpkin, 240.

appointed by Christ to be chosen and set apart by the Church (so called and gathered) for the peculiar Administration of Ordinances, and Execution of Power, or Duty, which he intrusts them with, or calls them to, to be continued to the end of the World, are (16) Bishops or Elders and Deacons.

[(16) Acts 20.17, with verse v. 28. Phil. I.I.]⁷¹

These Officers were to be formally recognized in the following way, as noted in the same chapter, section 9:

The way appointed by Christ for the Calling of any person, fitted, and gifted by the Holy Spirit, unto the Office of Bishop, or Elder, in a Church, is, that he be chosen thereunto by the common (17) suffrage of the Church it self, and Solemnly set apart by Fasting and Prayer, with imposition of hands of the (18) Eldership of the Church, if there be any before Constituted therein; And of a (19) Deacon that he be chosen by the like suffrage, and set apart by Prayer, and the like Imposition of hands.

[(17) Act. I4.23. See the original. (18) I Tim. 4.14. (19) Act. 6.3, 5, 6.]⁷²

Several things are worth noting about this influential confession. While the churches gave their approval of those selected, the selected were ordained by the “Eldership,” which means only pastors were involved in the laying on of hands. Further, there is a clear distinction between an elder and a deacon. That is, as in the New Testament, deacons were not considered elders in the church. Finally, the spiritual nature of these important decisions was emphasized by the admonition to “Prayer” and “Fasting.”

Other Sources from Early English Baptists

N. Cox and “A Sermon Preached,” 1681

In 1681 Thomas Fabian had a sermon printed which N. Cox had preached at an

⁷¹ Lumpkin, 287; McGlothlin, 266.

⁷² Lumpkin, 287; McGlothlin, 266.

ordination service in London. The primary emphasis Cox placed on deacon service was their care for the poor. He states, “yea the poor Members of Christ, which are dear to him as the Apple of his Eye, are committed to your Care.” This care could only be carried if several conditions were met.⁷³

For example, the deacons had certain responsibilities. They could not “relieve the Necessities of the poor Saints” without a proper concern for them. He believed “your Heart must be in your work.” Therefore, he admonished “do by a gracious Sympathy, as it were, put your selves in their stead.” Further, in order for deacons to be qualified for this task, they were to be faithful, compassionate, prudent, and diligent. Finally, they were to be responsible for keeping up with and distributing the funds given for the poor. Thus, they must be “full of wisdom” and be able to “rightly discern of the Case and Circumstances of those that are to be relieved by him.”⁷⁴

Additionally, the church also had a responsibility toward the deacons. They were to encourage and show respect to their deacons. Further, because of the deacons’ responsibility to the poor, the church was to trust them with the finances necessary to carry out their ministry.⁷⁵ Thus, ministry to the poor was at the heart of what the deacons were to do--and the church was responsible for seeing that they had the resources to carry out their mission.

⁷³ N. Cox, “A Sermon Preached at the Ordination of an Elder and Deacons in a Baptized Congregation in London” (London: Printed for Thomas Fabian, 1681), 12-14, as cited by Deweese, *Emerging Role*, 23-24.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ N. Cox, 15, as cited by Deweese, *Emerging Role*, 24.

The Right Constitution and True Subjects of the Visible Church of Christ, 1654

Thomas Collier was an extremely influential Particular Baptist evangelist for many years in western England.⁷⁶ Later, however, he became more moderate in his Calvinistic theology. In the end, it may be said that he was neither Particular nor General but desired that the two groups be more cooperative.⁷⁷ In 1691 he wrote *A Short Confession or a Brief Narrative of Faith* which expressed his ideas. This confession was well accepted by most Baptists in the west. Thus, Collier was quite influential in shaping the thought of early English Baptists in his area of the country.⁷⁸

In addition to his *Brief Narrative*, Collier also wrote *The Right Constitution*, published in 1654.⁷⁹ In this earlier writing, he stated that a deacon was to serve his church by serving tables and edify his church by exercising his spiritual gifts. The tables he was to serve included the table of the Lord, the table of the minister, and the table of the poor.⁸⁰ This may have been the first instance of the “three tables” being utilized in Baptist life. Further, the “table of the Lord” ties the deacons directly to the Lord’s Supper, which may also have been a first in Baptist life. In any event, their ministry was to focus on meeting the needs of the church, the pastor, and the poor according to the abilities given them by God.

⁷⁶ McBeth, 67-68.

⁷⁷ Lumpkin, 334; McBeth, 67-68.

⁷⁸ Lumpkin, 334-35; McBeth, 67-68.

⁷⁹ Deweese, *Emerging Role*, 23.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

The Glory and Ornament of a True Gospel-Constituted Church, 1697

In 1697 Elias Keach, and his father Benjamin, both ministers in London, revised the *Second London Confession* for their churches.⁸¹ This revision later became extremely influential as a confession in America because of the work Elias had done in the Middle Colonies.⁸² In his *Glory and Ornament*, Keach stated, following the thought of Collier, that deacons were to serve three tables--that of the Lord, the minister, and the poor.⁸³ It was further indicated that the deacons were to encourage church members in systematic and voluntary giving.⁸⁴

Church Records and Minutes

Other information concerning the deacon ministry is available from a number of church records and minutes. These sources, more than the confessions, probably indicate how deacons actually functioned within the local church.

The Ordination, Selection, and Proving of Deacons

Concerning the election process, one church operated "by ye majority of voices,"⁸⁵

⁸¹ McBeth, 241.

⁸² Deweese, *Emerging Role*, 24.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Whitley, ed., *The Church Books of Ford or Cuddington and Amersham in the County of Bucks* (London: Kingsgate Press, 1912), 8, (cited hereafter as Whitley, *Church Books*), as cited by Deweese, *Emerging Role*, 26.

while others used a single paper ballot⁸⁶ or cast lots.⁸⁷ Those casting lots did not see it as chance but a sure way for the Lord to pick whom He wanted. In this way, the Lord “would order and dispose of them” and also leave the church with the assurance that those elected in such manner were “chosen by the Lord.”⁸⁸ Ordination usually included one or all of the following: fasting, prayer, and the laying on of hands.⁸⁹ At least one case involved setting a man apart “upon trial,” presumably in order to let him be proved (cf. 1 Tim. 3:10).⁹⁰

The Function of Deacons Regarding Church Monies

Deacons were also involved with church monies. This generally included encouraging members to give and distributing funds to the poor.⁹¹ Along with this latter practice, there were often clear guidelines for handling these monies. One church required three steps from the deacons before monies could be dispersed: (1) the person had to share their need with the church or the deacons, (2) the deacons evaluated the need and

⁸⁶ Edward Bean Underhill, ed., *The Records of a Church of Christ Meeting in Broadmead, Bristol, 1640-1687* (London: J. Haddon, 1847), 425, (cited hereafter as Underhill, *Broadmead*), as cited by Deweese, *Emerging Role*, 27.

⁸⁷ Edward Bean Underhill, ed., *Records of the Churches of Christ Gathered at Fenstanton, Warboys, and Hexham, 1647-1720* (London: Haddon, Brothers, and Co., 1854), 190, 243, 269, (cited hereafter as Underhill, *Fenstanton*), as cited by Deweese, *Emerging Role*, 26-27.

⁸⁸ Underhill, *Fenstanton*, 190, 243, 269..

⁸⁹ Deweese, *Emerging Role*, 28.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 28-29.

then shared it with at least two church members, one of whom was to be a pastor, and (3) after determining the need, the deacons could offer financial help, but again, only after the consent of a pastor and at least one other member. The second step kept the deacons from being “blamed for doing things according to their own mind” while step three ensured “that the congregation may always know how their stock is laid out.”⁹² Deweese observes that, “This whole policy illustrated that deacon authority was determined by the church and not by the deacons.”⁹³

A few churches seemed to let their deacons be caretakers of their entire church funds. For instance, the Broadmead Church at Bristol ordained two deacons in 1680, with the pastor clearly admonishing them that it would be their responsibility to carefully supervise the church funds.⁹⁴ This occurrence may have been due to the intense persecution they experienced during the later Stuart era (1660-1688); many times they were unable to keep a pastor long before he would be imprisoned or killed.⁹⁵ Whatever the reason, strict measures were taken to ensure the proper handling of these monies. Several churches required the deacons to give a regular account of the money at their disposal.⁹⁶ At one of these same churches, there were further measures taken to discipline deacons if there was a willful attempt to usurp any kind of authority. Any deacon desiring

⁹² Ibid., 29.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 28-29.

⁹⁵ McBeth, 113-120.

⁹⁶ Deweese, *Emerging Role*, 29.

to wield power should be ready to welcome appropriate punishment as “the Church shall Judg & the Lord by his word shall give.”⁹⁷

The Faithfulness of Deacons During Persecution

Certain ministries were assumed by the deacons during intense times of persecution. This was particularly true in regard to the calamities landed on the churches during the Stuart era (as mentioned above). The church at Bristol wrote about such affliction in the following way:

our Ministers being taken from us, one dead, and ye rest Imprissoned, and we feared their death likewise in such a Bad Prisson, and we being pursued closely . . . by ye Bishop’s men For our Partes, at our Meeting, we presently made use of our ministering gifts in ye Church, (as we did in former persecutions, Contenting ourselves with meane gifts and coarse fare in ye want of Better). Wherefore we considered which way to Maintaine our Meetings, by preserving our Speaker.⁹⁸

Due to the absence of many pastors who were imprisoned and killed, deacons willingly stepped in to help their churches in new ways. Some accepted the ministry of baptizing of new converts.⁹⁹ It appears that the churches, however, did not feel comfortable with their administering the Lord’s Supper.¹⁰⁰ Finally, as mentioned above, it was due to these circumstances that the deacons were entrusted with the church monies for safe keeping. This safe keeping would have been especially important to the churches,

⁹⁷ Whitley, *Church Books*, 203, as cited by Deweese, *Emerging Role*, 30.

⁹⁸ Roger Hayden, ed. *The Records of a Church of Christ in Bristol, 1640-1687* (Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 1974), 150, as cited in McBeth, 119.

⁹⁹ McBeth, 119.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

who were experiencing extremely short pastoral tenures and always having to meet at different times and places. Such a willingness to serve, no doubt, brought great respect and honor for these men in their churches.

The European Baptists of Other Nationalities

A majority of the Baptists that have appeared in Europe and America have had their roots in the early English Baptists.¹⁰¹ Though Baptists in America will be covered in the next section, the Baptists in other parts of Europe will be presented here. These generally had their start in the 1800's. This is by no means an exhaustive study and will be limited further to those confessions that deal in some measure with the deacon ministry.

German Baptists

The first German Baptist church on record was formed in Hamburg at the home of Johann Gerhard Oncken (1800-1884), the "Father of German Baptists," on April 23, 1834.¹⁰² Later, in 1847, he and two other Baptist leaders, Julius Kobner (a Danish Jew) and G. W. Lehmann (of Berlin), finished producing a *Confession of Faith and Constitution of the Churches of Baptized Christians*.¹⁰³ This confession of fifteen articles was readily approved by several churches, and in 1849, it was adopted by the newly formed "Union of Associated Churches of Baptized Christians in Germany and

¹⁰¹ McGlothlin, 330; Lumpkin, 401.

¹⁰² McGlothlin, 330-32; Lumpkin, 401-403.

¹⁰³ McGlothlin, 333.

Denmark.”¹⁰⁴

This confession, though brief, mentioned deacons as a specific office of the church. In Article 10, it states that, “The church itself chooses its elders, preachers, and ministers, who are clothed with their office through ordination.”¹⁰⁵ Apparently, the deacons are referred to in this place as “ministers,” literally meaning servants (Acts 6:2-5 is used as Scripture support). Later in Article 10, two specific categories of “Offices” are mentioned, that of “Elders and Preachers” and that of “Servants.”¹⁰⁶ Concerning the latter category, it states:

The deacons or servants of the church must possess the characteristics indicated in Scripture (28). They assist the elders and preachers in their office and the temporal affairs of the church are specially committed to them (29).

[(28) Acts 6:3. I Tim. 3:8-12. (29) Acts 6:1-4.]¹⁰⁷

Thus, deacons were an integral part of the Baptist church of Germany. Their office did not include overseeing in the church but serving their pastors and their church in whatever areas needed attention. Further, it is evident that they accepted Acts 6:1-5, as well as 1 Timothy 3:8-13, as the foundation for deacon ministry.

As mentioned above, ordination was also an important function of the church. Since they believed the elders, preachers, and ministers chosen by the church were “clothed with their office through ordination,” it was important to understand the meaning

¹⁰⁴ Lumpkin, 402.

¹⁰⁵ McGlothlin, 343.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 343-44.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 344, 346.

and method of ordination. Article 10 states,

By ordination we understand the usage, which the holy Scripture teaches us, that the persons chosen by the church for service are set apart by the elders and preachers of this or some other church, by the laying on of hands and through prayer, to the work of their calling (15).

[(15) Heb. 6:2. Acts 14:23. 13:3 1 Tim. 5:22. Tit. 1:5. Acts 6:6.]¹⁰⁸

According to this, ordination was an important function to be carried out by the pastors with the laying on of hands and prayer. The purpose of this setting aside was not to honor the man (whether preacher or deacon) but to emphasize the *work* and *service* to which he was being called.

A final area of importance in this confession is the admonition to both pastors and deacons to live godly lives after being called and ordained by the church. Again, Article 10 states,

With regard to their manner of life they remain afterwards as before, like every other member, subject to the discipline of the church. This must be done, however, in accordance with 1 Tim. 5:19.¹⁰⁹

In this section of the confession, it is clear that godliness and accountability was required on the part of the officers. If a man ceased to serve or live in an exemplary manner, he would answer to the church.

In 1944, due to the persecution received at the hands of the Nazi regime, several evangelical groups (including Plymouth Brethren, some Pentecostal type churches, and others) sought union with the Baptists.¹¹⁰ Together they adopted a revised and shortened

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 343, 346.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 343.

¹¹⁰ Lumpkin, 402.

version of the *Confession (1847)*. They entitled it a *Confession of Faith of the Alliance of Evangelical-Free Church Congregations*. This confession recognizes the offices of “evangelists, pastors, teachers, preachers, elders and deacons for special ministries of the Church.”¹¹¹ No special description is given for the individual positions, but the collective group was to be led by the Spirit of God, in cooperation with the church, and for the edification of the body.¹¹² When carried out in practice, each of these three ideas present vital aspects of a healthy church.

French Baptists

The first Baptist church to be formally organized in France appeared in Douay around 1835 through the efforts of an American missionary Erasmus Willard.¹¹³ In 1848, Willard produced the first French Baptist confession, revising it a few years later with the help of a few French brethren.¹¹⁴ However, it was not until 1879 that an independently developed (though probably influenced by Willard’s previous work) confession came from the French themselves.¹¹⁵ It was entitled *Confession of Faith and Ecclesiastical Principles of the Union of the Baptist Churches of France*.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 405.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., 410.

¹¹⁴ McGlothlin, 354; Lumpkin, 410.

¹¹⁵ McGlothlin, 354; Lumpkin, 410.

This confession recognized two offices or “special charge[s]” in the church.¹¹⁶ The first was that of pastor (or teacher, or bishop, or overseer, or elder) and the second was that of deacons and deaconesses.¹¹⁷ Each of these positions was to be filled with members chosen by the congregation and “installed in their functions by prayer and the imposition of the hands of the elders.”¹¹⁸ Again, ordination was carried out by the pastors. The deacons (and deaconesses) were to “possess the qualities required by the Scriptures.”¹¹⁹ Their function was to be that of a servant, as shown by the general guidelines included in Part II: The Church, Article IV: “Deacons and Deaconesses”:

their office is to assist the pastors in their ministry, to serve the church in consecrating to it the gifts they have received from the Lord, and in charging themselves with all that which has relation to the material wants of the assembly.¹²⁰

Thus, the office was considered one of service, not of overseeing the church or the pastors. Rather, the overseeing of the church was rightly ascribed to the pastors who as “overseers chosen by the church, are charged with the administration of baptism and the supper, direction of worship and the deliberations of the church, and with the execution of its decisions.”¹²¹ Further, each officer was to exercise his or her spiritual gift(s) in their

¹¹⁶ McGlothlin, 359.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 361-62.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 361.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 362.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

service. Possibly the most important point, however, is the emphasis placed on ministry to the people of their “assembly.”

In 1924 the Baptist churches of southern France formed their own association and adopted a condensed version of the 1879 confession entitled, *Confession of Faith and Ecclesiastical Principles of the Evangelical Association of French-Speaking Baptist Churches*.¹²² This confession also recognized only two offices, that of pastor and that of deacon (and deaconess). The deacon’s role was “to assist the pastors or elders in their ministry by assuming especial responsibility for everything that relates to the material interests of the congregation.”¹²³ Their stated function, therefore, was not to oversee church matters but to assist their pastors and their churches. This function was implemented by caring for the everyday needs of those in the congregation. Finally, both pastors and deacons were accountable to their local church, which had the authority to discipline them.¹²⁴

Swedish Baptists

Sweden saw its first Baptist church formed in 1848.¹²⁵ However, the lack of official and legal recognition by the government, heavy persecution, and tremendous loss

¹²² Lumpkin, 411.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 415.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ McGlothlin, 364.

of members through emigration resulted in only one confession of faith being produced.¹²⁶ In 1861 the First Baptist Church of Stockholm drafted a short confession which was presented in June of that same year to a conference attended by all the Baptists of Sweden. This conference adopted "*The Confession of Faith of the Swedish Baptists, adopted at their general Conference, June 28, 1861.*"¹²⁷ This confession is brief but does recognize both pastors and deacons. Article 9 states that the local church has the freedom "under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to choose among themselves shepherds or overseers, and deacons."¹²⁸ The responsibilities of these two positions, being lumped together, was "to administer baptism and the Lord's supper, to practice Christian church-discipline, to promote godliness and brotherly love, and to contribute to the general spread of the gospel . . ."¹²⁹ Thus, deacons were certainly recognized and were called upon to serve, discipline, nurture, and share the gospel.

Australian Baptists

Baptist life in Australia began in 1831. However, it was not until 1836 that the first Baptist church was formed in Sidney. By 1926, associations and state unions came together to form the Baptist Union of Australia.¹³⁰ The largest section of this Union is the

¹²⁶ Ibid., 364-65.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 365.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 367.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Lumpkin, 416.

Baptist Union of Victoria, which in 1888 provided the “Doctrinal Basis of the Baptist Union of Victoria” as part of the requirements of becoming incorporated under the laws of the state. The statement is brief but has an attached document, “Principles and Ideals of the Baptist Faith,” which is presented each year in the constitution of the Union. The “Principles” state in section Number 6: The Ministry of Leadership, that the minister accepts his call from the Lord, and though he is a “servant” of the church, “the Church is not his master.”¹³¹ The minister is the primary leader of the church, but other men and women are to assist him in areas where they are gifted. Next it states that “church officers” are set aside as “spiritual leaders” to assist the minister and members of the church. Whether or not this is speaking of deacons is not specified, but it is assumed that it does.¹³²

Russian Baptists

Russian Baptists began to appear in the late eighteenth century after being founded through the efforts of migrant German Mennonites and through the distribution of Bibles by the British and Foreign Bible Society.¹³³ Though no official statement was issued by their Baptist Union, one sixty page doctrinal confession “Religious Doctrine of the Evangelical Christians” proved to be quite popular.¹³⁴ This statement says in “Chapter

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 419.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 422.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

XV: Organization of the Local Church” that there are to be two main offices in the church--that of presbyters (elders, bishops, or pastors) and that of deacons. Each of these, in turn, has been ordained by God with certain gifts.¹³⁵ The presbyters were to teach and shepherd while the deacons were to “watch over the matters of charity (Acts 6:1-4).”¹³⁶ However, the deacons should also be “learned in the Word and should conduct discourses (Acts 6:9-10).”¹³⁷

Deacon Ministry Among Baptists in America

Deacon Ministry Among Baptists in the Early Years

The important role that deacons played in America can be recognized when moving forward in history and across the Atlantic. The information available concerning the role of deacons from the 1600’s is quite limited.¹³⁸ Beginning in the 1700’s and moving through the mid-1800’s, however, information is more readily available.¹³⁹ A survey of the available documents from this period indicates that the most commonly held belief was that deacons were to meet “the needs of the table of the Lord, the table of the

¹³⁵ Ibid., 427.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 428.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Deweese, *Emerging Role*, 31.

¹³⁹ For a good survey, see Charles W. Deweese, “Ministries of Baptist Deacons in Early America,” in *Baptist History and Heritage* XXV, no. 2 (April 1990): 3-14. This issue was dedicated to *Baptist Deacons: A Story of Service*. Cited hereafter as Deweese, *BHH*.

poor, and the table of the minister.”¹⁴⁰

This definition, no doubt, was adopted from the heavily influential writing of Elias Keach, *The Glory and Ornament of a True Gospel-constituted Church* (mentioned above). Baptist historian Edward Starr states that this work “was brought into unexpected prominence in America, where Elias had worked.”¹⁴¹ This is probably true due to Keach’s having served as a pastor in the Middle Colonies. As he preached in the churches of that era, he taught that, “The Work of Deacons is to serve Tables, viz. to see to provide for the Lord’s Table, the Minister’s Table, and the Poor’s Table.”¹⁴² He likewise advocated, among other things, that the deacon was to “visit the Poor, and know their Condition as much as in them lies.”¹⁴³ This was to be done so “that none, especially the aged Widows, be neglected.”¹⁴⁴

This popular belief of the deacons’s function was further solidified in 1743 by the Philadelphia Baptist Association when they adopted “A Short Treatise of Church Discipline” as an appendix to their *Confession*. This appendix was written by Benjamin Griffith, who used, among other sources, a tract previously published by Keach.¹⁴⁵ This

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 42.

¹⁴¹ Edward C. Starr, ed., *A Baptist Bibliography*, vol. 13 (Rochester, N. Y.: American Baptist Historical Society, 1968), 29, as cited in Deweese, *BHH*, 3.

¹⁴² Deweese, *BHH*, 3.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Lumpkin, 352.

document stated, “Deacons are men called forth by the church, to serve in the outward concerns thereof; whose office is to serve tables, Acts vi. 2-7.”¹⁴⁶ Thus, it is evident that English Baptists greatly influenced the philosophy of deacon ministry in early America.

Though other materials are available from this era, Deweese has aptly summarized their contents. He says,

As the preceding documents show, Baptists in America in the 1700’s basically viewed their deacons as “table servers”

Eighteenth-century descriptions of deacons as table servers emerged on a strong biblical foundation. *Diakonos*, the New Testament Greek word translated “deacon” or “servant,” is based on the root words *dia* (through) and *konis* (dust). Thus, *diakonos* originally referred to a barefooted table waiter who walked through dust to serve dining guests.¹⁴⁷

Deacon Ministry Among Southern Baptists

In 1845 the Southern Baptist Convention was established as a separate denomination. Also in the mid-1800’s, a change began to take place which effectively redefined the role of the deacon. Instead of following a servant motif, deacons became administrators and overseers. Howard Foshee has shared a practical reason as to why this practice probably became so commonly accepted. In a short survey of Baptist history, he remarks:

During the 1700’s the deacon in America played a significant role. He was often the one who provided spiritual leadership to members of a congregation when inclement weather kept the part-time pastor from reaching the church community. Deacons have had a rich heritage of service through the centuries in America.

Gradually deacons were called on to handle more of the administrative

¹⁴⁶ Deweese, *BHH*, 4.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

work of the church. Oftentimes the deacons were the only elected church officers available to care for finances and property. Through the years the unfortunate phrase “board of deacons” developed. The concept of a legislative board of any kind is completely foreign to congregational church polity. Only the congregation, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, should make major decisions for a church.¹⁴⁸

This system of church government not only gradually occurred, it was also specifically taught. A number of Baptist church manuals were published from 1845 to 1867 and were heavily influential in Baptist practice. These books, it is estimated, due to their longevity, sold hundreds of thousands of copies.¹⁴⁹ One of these manuals, *Church Manual* (1867) by J. M. Pendleton, the great leader of the Landmark Movement, had a tremendous impact on Southern Baptist life. He suggested that deacons should be heavily involved in the business end of the church.¹⁵⁰ This was not the first time this sprouting new idea had been presented, however. It was simply in agreement with the views expressed in the book *The Deaconship* which had been published in 1846 by R. B. C. Howell, pastor of FBC Nashville and editor of *The Baptist*.¹⁵¹ This work was probably more influential than Pendleton’s manual.

¹⁴⁸ Howard B. Foshee, *Broadman Church Manual* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1973), 102-103.

¹⁴⁹ Deweese, *Emerging Role*, 43. These were William Crowell's *The Church Member's Manual* (1845); J. Newton Brown's *The Baptist Church Manual* (1853); Edward T. Hiscox's *The Baptist Church Directory* (1859); and J. M. Pendleton's *Church Manual* (1867). Another heavily influential book was *The Deaconship* (1846), by R. B. C. Howell.

¹⁵⁰ Deweese, *Emerging Role*, 43-44.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 46. The book has been so influential that it went through its eleventh printing in 1977 at Judson Press.

In Baptist history, Howell's book first mentioned the concept of a "board." He proclaimed that deacons were to be "the financial officers of the church" and designated them as "a BOARD OF OFFICERS, or the *executive board* of the church, for her temporal department."¹⁵² Thus, for the first time, the idea that deacons were overseers and were to serve as a board was introduced into Baptist life. Hence, according to Howell, the deacons were to control the church business and finances while the pastor took care of the spiritual matters. Herein was the false dichotomy formed between the temporal and spiritual aspects of church life. It was false in that it was diametrically opposed to the New Testament; it assumed that the temporal affairs of the church had no connection to its spiritual aspects and introduced the idea of an overseeing board which is not consistent with the New Testament or with Baptist church polity. As Deweese notes,

This trend, which converted the deaconship into church business management, represented a marked departure from the New Testament idea of deacons as ministers of practical service. While doing church business is a ministry, it is not the primary function of deacons. The Bible and church history call for a fuller participation of deacons in meeting the basic needs of hurting humanity.¹⁵³

But how did Howell come to such a conclusion? It has been noted that Howell was probably following the secular business pattern that was developing during his time.

According to John F. Loftis,

Historians of American business pinpoint 1841 as the beginning of the managerial revolution in America. The revolution consisted of the establishment of business bureaucracies patterned after the military organization. Howell's description of the tasks and organization of the

¹⁵² Ibid, 46.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 44.

deacons was consistent with the professional managerial model emerging at the time.¹⁵⁴

As with all things not biblical, the results of this movement were devastating. One Baptist pastor and historian Thomas Armitage responded in 1852 that it was wrong to recognize the deacon as someone

of so much importance and ecclesiastical consequence in the Church, that all the membership, and all the affairs in the Church, and the Pastor, must be dictated, and ruled, and governed by him.¹⁵⁵

Others, including John L. Dagg, Alvah Hovey, and Edwin C. Dargan, spoke out against this trend.

Another influential person in the years that followed was P. E. Burroughs, whose training book *Honoring the Deaconship* indoctrinated thousands of churches with the idea that the deacons were responsible for the finances of the local church.¹⁵⁶ This book was published in 1929 when he served as Secretary of the Church Administration Department of the Baptist Sunday School Board.¹⁵⁷ His book served as *the* definitive work on deacon ministry in Southern Baptist life for twenty-seven years from the time of its publication

¹⁵⁴ John F. Loftis, "The Emerging Identity of Deacons, 1800-1950," in *Baptist History and Heritage* XXV, no. 2 (April 1990): 16. This issue was dedicated to *Baptist Deacons: A Story of Service*.

¹⁵⁵ Deweese, *Emerging Role*, 47-48.

¹⁵⁶ P. E. Burroughs, *Honoring the Deaconship* (Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1929), 82, as cited by Loftis, 18.

¹⁵⁷ Robert Sheffield, *The Ministry of Baptist Deacons* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1990), 22.

until 1956.¹⁵⁸ In his book, Burroughs stated,

In the division of labor and the assignment of a place to the deacon, a fairly clear line was drawn as to the relation of the deacon to the church. On one side of the line stands the pastor. He is, shall we say, the ranking officer especially entrusted with the ministry which is more distinctly spiritual. On the other side is the deacon, standing next to the pastor, and entrusted with the care of the material interests of the church. He is to care for the properties of the church, its buildings, its pastor's home, and its other material holdings. He is to direct and safeguard the financial side of its ministry. As contrasted with the pastor he is to serve in what may be called the materialistics of the church.¹⁵⁹

This type of errant thinking has caused a great travesty in Southern Baptist life.

Since much has been said about the deacon board, it might be helpful for some who want to avoid or get rid of it to be able to properly identify this pitfall. Foshee, in his book *The Ministry of the Deacon* clearly identifies a church functioning according to a board mentality:

- (1) When the deacon's responsibilities are made up solely of business management matters.
- (2) When deacons administer the affairs of the church primarily as a business operation.
- (3) When deacons are viewed as the decision makers in most business affairs.
- (4) When business efficiency seems to dominate the activities of the deacons.¹⁶⁰

It should be noted that most writers for the past thirty years in SBC life have tried

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 23.

¹⁵⁹ Burroughs, 21-22, as cited in Sheffield, 23.

¹⁶⁰ Howard Foshee, *The Ministry of the Deacon* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1968), 35-36, as cited in Sheffield, 23.

to combat this error.¹⁶¹ However, it nonetheless seems to prevail in current church history. The necessary competition created within the local church has been the foundation for untold and countless church fights and splits. This is especially true in the twentieth century church due to the idea of deacons serving as overseers having been taken to even greater extremes in church practice.

It must also be noted, however, that even since the 1950's a deacon ministry model has still not been presented that is totally congruent with Scripture. Each of the previous writers, such as Foshee, Sheffield, and others have spoken against a deacon board but still cannot admit the need for biblical pastoral leadership. For instance, Sheffield, following the lead of Foshee, has stated, "The pastor and staff do not supervise the deacons. Neither do the deacons supervise the pastor and staff."¹⁶² While the latter half of the preceding statement is certainly correct, in that deacons are not supervisors but servants, the first half is misleading. When compared with the clear directives of Scripture, it is evident that the pastor is to supervise and oversee the church--period (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-5; 1 Timothy 3:1; 5:17-21; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24). There are no footnotes excluding the deacons from this oversight.

While at least, therefore, the deacon is informed that he is not to oversee, there is still a considerable aperture in the current philosophy. The church has gone from deacon-led to church-led, which provides no structure at all and invites total chaos. Any sensible organization must have leadership. Jesus, who is Head of the church, has specifically

¹⁶¹ Sheffield, 24.

¹⁶² Ibid., 33.

given a command for the sheep to follow the leadership of the Shepherd through the guidance of His appointed undershepherd.

Since the role of the deacon is once again taking a prominent place in Baptist life, and needfully so, it is necessary that it also recover its true biblical nature of serving. It appears that slowly but surely the inadequate system of the deacon board is being replaced. If so, Baptist life will flourish once again with these ministers serving and blessing the people of God in their local churches.

SECTION II: CURRENT TRENDS IN DEACON MINISTRY

CHAPTER 9

INTERVIEWS WITH THEOLOGICAL PROFESSORS

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers . . . Ephesians 4:11

This section deals with the input from theological educators concerning the deacon ministry. Their insights are important for several reasons: they generally have a thorough knowledge of the New Testament, work with many pastors, and are acquainted with the current atmosphere in church life. Additionally, they are usually familiar with what is being taught in institutions of higher learning, realizing such teaching has a profound impact on what is heard from the pulpit and on what is prescribed in denominational literature. With these things in mind, a short summary of the interviews that were conducted with three Baptist professors will be presented. The interviews in their entirety are presented in *Appendix E: Transcripts of the Interviews with Theological Professors*.

The interviews were conducted with two Southern Baptist professors, Dr. William Bell, Jr. of Dallas Baptist University and Dr. L. Paige Patterson, President of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. The third interview was conducted with Dr. Elmer Towns, founder of Church Growth Institute, and professor at Liberty University. Dr. Towns is an Independent Baptist, but is readily accepted by, and thoroughly familiar with, a large

number of leaders and churches in various denominations. Their respective views will be grouped in the following categories:

The Nature of the Deacon Ministry. Each of these men freely admitted that deacons are to be servants, not overseers, in the church. Based on their knowledge of the New Testament, they clearly recognize that pastor(s) have been charged with providing the primary leadership for the church.

The Role of the Deacon. While Bell and Patterson give little weight to any administrative function for the deacon, Towns gives limited consideration to this idea. It appears from the research of the author that, by and far, Independent Baptists entrust their pastors with significantly greater freedom to lead their churches. Likewise, they also invest more authority in their deacons. Independents sometimes see their pastors as being similar to a CEO and their deacon bodies as boards. Consequently, they have a more streamlined leadership than most Southern Baptists. Thus, while Towns adheres to a slightly, be it ever so slightly, different theological persuasion than the other two, all agree that a church will never prosper or grow in the way God intends if it is dominated by their deacons. All strongly agree that deacons are not the financial supervisors of the church nor the clearing house for approval of church matters.

The Role of the Pastor. As stated above, all three professors see strong evidence for pastor-led churches. With pastors responsible for overseeing, the deacon body is accountable to them. Likewise, the deacon should be willing to serve the pastor when the need arises. It is also the common consensus that both the pastor and deacons should honor one another.

The Issue of Ordaining Divorced Persons. On this subject, both Patterson and Towns agree that a divorced person should not be ordained. However, Bell says he has always maintained the position that the qualification for being the husband of one wife pertains to the quality of the person's present marital state. In other words, it is referring to a one-woman-kind-of-man who is presently a faithful and committed family man.

The Issue of Ordaining Women. Noting that it is a violation of Scriptural principles, Bell and Towns do not believe women should be ordained as pastors or deacons. Bell is clear that he understands the current issue to be deeply seated in the secular social trends of the day.

Patterson takes a mediating position. He is strongly opposed to the ordination of women to the pastorate, based on the explicit teaching of 1 Timothy 2:11-15. Nevertheless, he believes evidence is not so clear concerning the setting aside of a woman for the diaconate. However, this should be understood in light of his view of ordination. He believes the early church practice of setting aside was much less formal and carried considerably less weight than the present practice of ordination in the modern church. This informal view of ordination, coupled with the non-authoritative position of the deacon, would allow the unofficial setting aside of women for the work of ministry. In one sense, he believes these women workers might be called deaconesses. The work provided by these deaconesses would be crucial in that they, not the pastor, would perform counseling and other ministries to the women of the church.

Conclusion. This brief summary of the interviews is sufficient to give a basic understanding of their underlying philosophies of deacon ministry. For instance, there is

adequate information to substantiate that the common practice of having a deacon board is unscriptural--and not a biblically sound way to structure a church. Both Southern Baptist professors realize the disservice the deacon board mentality has provided in SBC churches. They believe this practice is foundational in causing churches to become stagnant or die, and in crippling many pastors and their families. The author suggests that the reader take time to fully peruse the interesting conversations of these three men.

CHAPTER 10
A SURVEY OF SOUTHERN BAPTIST CHURCHES

Introduction

This chapter summarizes of the results of a survey conducted on the deacon ministry by the writer. The results, along with the questions, are presented in full in *Appendix F: A Survey of Deacon Ministry in the Local Southern Baptist Church*. The survey was conducted in early March of 1995 and was mailed to five hundred randomly selected Southern Baptist churches. It included churches of all sizes, ages, and settings (i.e., rural, city, etc.) located throughout the United States. In order to maintain consistency and ensure a wide spectrum of views, the following leaders were chosen to receive the survey: 100 Pastors, 100 Chairmen of Deacons, 100 Sunday School Directors, 100 Church Secretaries, and 100 Women's Missionary Union leaders. There were one hundred eighty-six respondents that replied before the deadline, for a 37.2% response. Forty-one deacons responded, accounting for approximately 22% of the total returns.

The following summary will include the results of all five respondent groups listed above. However, when necessary, the responses given by the Chairmen of Deacons will be compared separately from the whole (these results are also shared in full in a separate table of *Appendix F*). This separate comparison should provide a less subjective opinion

on certain questions that pertain to the beliefs or activities of the individual deacons.

A Summary of the Results

The Number of Deacons Serving: (Questions 1 & 2)

On the average, there are twenty-one deacons ordained for every church. The ratio of deacons and pastors serving in the local Southern Baptist church is approximately nine to one. That is, there are about 8.7 ordained deacons for every ordained pastor. The positive implication of this finding is that there is an ample supply of men to help serve in the church. One negative consequence might also be implied. If the deacons in a particular church are long-time friends and are functioning as a "board," it may be extremely difficult for anyone to pastor the church. This may be one reason many churches have frequent turnovers in pastoral leadership.

Miscellaneous Information: (Questions 3- 5)

Job Descriptions: (Question 3)

The survey indicated that almost half of all churches have no job description for their deacons. Having a job description can help to clarify issues and thus reduce the number of disagreements. However, in another sense, deacons are to be servants and should be willing to do whatever needs to be done. A man who is zealous to serve will readily find more than enough ministry to perform.

Rotation: (Question 4)

Almost 56% of all churches now have a rotating system for their deacon ministries. According to comments taken from the survey, this seems to be a growing trend. When a church has a rotating system for their deacons, it will effect the longevity of the deacons “official” service. Rotation is beneficial for giving men a break, letting them observe the ministry from outside, and ensuring that they are consistent in their service even when not “officially” serving. If a man does not spend time and energy serving or if he disqualifies himself, he is not asked to serve again once he has rotated off. However, this method of rotation should not substitute the Biblical mandate for loving church discipline. If a man, especially a leader in the church, is living in sin, he needs to be confronted by his fellow Christian brothers that he might be restored.

Emeritus Program: (Question 5)

The “Emeritus” program has been established for those who, because of age or ill health, can no longer actively serve as a deacon. Only about 28% of Southern Baptist churches have this type of honorary program. Some feel that if a man can no longer serve, then he should not be recognized as a deacon any longer. This is based on an understanding that the office is to be a place of service, not merely a place for honoring individuals. Others consider the honorary program to be a harmless way of expressing gratitude to those who have served faithfully for years.

The Practice of Ordination: (Questions 6-12)

Participants: (Questions 6-7)

Almost 87% of all churches have both their pastors and deacons participating in the laying on of hands. This deeply held tradition, however, does not seem substantiated by Scripture. In the New Testament it is clear that only the elders (i.e., apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors/teachers) performed the laying on of hands (Acts 6:3; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6; Also cf., Numbers 27:18-23; Deuteronomy 34:9).

About 11% of the churches surveyed have the whole congregation participate in the laying on of hands. For the same reasons as stated above, however, the New Testament example would deny this recent practice.

In addition, a large majority of churches (90%) invite ordained persons from outside their churches to participate in the laying on of hands. This may not be a healthy exercise either if those from the outside have not had the opportunity to observe first-hand the long-term faithfulness of the individual being ordained (1 Timothy 5:22).

Ordination and Women: (Questions 8-9)

Though women's issues are popular today, it seems that most Southern Baptist churches have resisted social pressures with regards to ordination. Only 5.4% of the churches surveyed would ordain a woman to the office of deacon, while only 1.1% would be willing to ordain a woman to the pastorate. The interesting differences in these two percentages show that an unwarranted bias may exist. Scripturally, however, the qualification of being "the husband of one wife" equally applies to the pastor (1 Timothy

3:2) and the deacons (1 Timothy 3:12). The averages for ordaining women to the diaconate were about the same for both “moderate” and “conservative” churches.¹

Ordination and Divorce: (Questions 10-11)

About 20% of the churches were willing to ordain someone who was divorced for the office of deacon, but only 4.9% were willing to ordain someone divorced to the office of pastor. Again, there may be a discrepancy indicated in these percentages. This is especially true in this instance because the qualifications concerning divorce are definitely the same for these two offices (1 Timothy 3:2, 12). If a church chooses to ordain a man for one position, then they should be willing to ordain him to the other.

Revoking an Ordination: (Question 12)

Only 13.8% of the churches had a policy regarding the revocation of an ordination. Although this may indicate that no such need ever arises, it is regrettably doubtful. It may indicate that churches are simply ignoring those who fall by the wayside. Few contemporary churches ever practice church discipline. Likewise, it may be that churches have found it is easier to place someone in a position than it is to remove him from it.

Deacon Training: (Questions 13-15)

Prerequisite Training: (Question 13)

Churches are putting low emphasis on the training of those ordained to the

¹ The original survey allowed each respondent to mark whether they were “moderate” or “conservative” according to current SBC slang.

diaconate. Only about 32% require any training prior to being set aside. This may be one of the weakest areas in the local church. If a man is not willing to train, grow, and mature in the Christian faith (by committing to classes or seminars in evangelism, prayer, doctrine, etc.) before he “becomes” a deacon, then he probably will not afterwards. To not offer training for those willing, humble, God-fearing men who desire to grow in their areas of service is an especially sad commentary for a church. Any deacon should have the opportunity to receive training before he goes to work visiting the sick, the lost, etc.

Continuous Training: (Questions 14-15)

Similarly, only 36.8% of churches offer continuous training. Unless one is constantly maturing in Christ, he will become cold and stagnant. Like the new birth, “becoming” a deacon at ordination is not the end but the beginning of a fruit bearing life.

One good incentive for training is to offer courses that lead to earning a certificate or diploma. This can provide a good guideline and goal for systematically advancing in one’s skills in the ministry. However, only 20.7% of the churches offer such a program.

The Biblical Basis for the Deacon Ministry: (Questions 16-18)

Approximately 7.4% of those surveyed believed the word “deacon” means “overseer” or “administrator.” This same phenomenon is even true among Chairmen of Deacons, in that 4.8% of them thought this was the basic meaning of the word. It is impossible for someone to function properly as a deacon when they do not know the basic meaning of the word. However, a greater number of churches evidently adhere to this understanding of the word with 17.4% referring to their deacons as a “board.” Board has

the common connotation of being a group of administrators or supervisors. This is not the meaning of deacon (*diakonos*). A deacon is a “tablewaiter,” not a manager.

Worse even still, 30.1% of the churches indicated they believed deacons were to “oversee and administrate the direction, planning, and finances of the church” as a major part of their job. Higher still, 37.4% percent (See Question 23) indicated deacons had equal responsibility with the pastor in carrying out the overall administration of the church. The deacons themselves showed an even higher (42.5%) belief that this was a part of their service to the church. Only 12.7% of pastors understand this to be the deacon’s job. Thus, deacons are most convinced that they are to oversee, with the church trailing behind them, and most pastors understand the opposite. Herein, mixed expectations provide the main ingredient for conflict.

Finally, these statistics may indicate that the church is living according to tradition, rather than biblical principles. This is evident when principle is not carried out in practice.

The Biblical Basis for the Pastor: (Questions 19-22)

This section may also prove that the church is living by “tradition,” as indicated by the discrepancy between principle and practice. Over 91% of the respondents personally believed that the pastor was to be the primary overseer in the spiritual and business matters of the church while only 82% of the respondents believed the Bible teaches this same truth. At the same time, respondents estimated that only 70% of the members in their respective churches adhered to this truth. Again, the deacons differed from their churches in that only 66.6% of them recognized this truth.

Leadership and Authority in the Church: (Questions 23-25)

The “tradition” is shown more explicitly by the statistics in this section. Whereas at least 70% of the respondents’ churches believed the pastor was to be the overseer based on principle, only 55.3% believed the pastor was primarily responsible for leading the local church in spiritual and business matters. More amazingly, 37.4% believed the pastor and deacons were equally responsible for this aspect of church life. Almost 5% of the Chairmen of Deacons thought it was their (the deacons) responsibility, *above* that of the pastor, to lead the church. Thus, the “servants” and the “pastors,” though having distinct roles as described in Scripture (and church principle) are responsible for doing the same thing--overseeing the church. Likewise, in the written comments, many respondents attempted to divide the “spiritual” and “business” aspects of overseeing. However, no Scripture was used, because there is none to substantiate this false dichotomy.

When speaking of specific issues, such as building maintenance, starting a new ministry, etc., the gap even widens further. Only 49.4% believed the pastor should be approached for matters of this nature, whereas 19.4% believed it was the place of the Chairman of Deacons or the deacon “board” to approve such matters. Over 22% of the deacons believed it was their place to approve such matters. Sixty-two percent of pastors understood it to be their place, while only 15.2% thought it was the place of the deacons. Again, here are the ingredients for a church fight.

That churches do experience fighting and trouble between the pastor and deacons is evident by the respondents’ own testimonies. According to the statistics, 42.9% of the respondents and 66.6% of the deacons had experienced strife between these leaders.

Pastor-Deacon Relations: (Questions 26-29)

Accountability: (Questions 26-27)

This section deals with specifics of how the pastor and deacons relate to one another. Almost 19% said it was one of the deacons' primary responsibilities to hold the pastor accountable (only 17.5% of the deacons thought so). Over 58% stated that deacons were not accountable to their pastor at all. This is probably one of the most unbelievable statistics in the entire survey, especially in light of the clear teaching of Scripture that the pastor is to oversee the church (1 Timothy 3:1,2; Titus 1:7; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). There are no "footnotes" excluding the deacons from this oversight. Only 51.9% understood that those who serve as deacons are to be accountable to both the church and the pastor. Accordingly, 12.2% of the Chairmen of Deacons did not believe they were accountable to the pastor or the church.

This structure is especially dangerous in light of so many people believing deacons are to be administrators. With this combination, the top "administrators" (i.e., deacons) are going to run things without regard to the pastor (who is only to be involved in spiritual matters). Consequently, one has a church polity that is completely opposite that found in the New Testament. This twisting of God's Word surely makes the devil laugh, giggle, and overflow with joy as he knocks down one victory after the other. Somehow the "overseer" is being "oversaw" and the "servant" is "overseeing." This is backwards.

Setting the Pastor's Salary: (Question 28)

Eleven percent of the churches indicated that the deacons were responsible for

setting the pastor's salary. This could be a terrible situation for the pastor and his family, specifically if conflict occurs between the pastor and deacon in the church.

Working Relationship: (Question 29)

Almost 93% of those responding believed their pastor and deacons had a good working relationship. This is a positive light compared to many of the other statistics.

Church-Deacon Relations: (Questions 30-34)

Another indicator that some churches have misunderstood the New Testament teaching on the deacon is evident by the way the deacons relate to their church. For instance, 20.9% of the respondents indicated that the deacons must approve the business matters of their church. Obviously, deacons are "overseeing" rather than "serving."

Almost 11% of those surveyed and 15% of the deacons believe that a deacon should be placed on all committees in the church. Likewise, 14.3% of the churches have their committees report to the deacons. Again, this is an overseeing function. About 90% indicate that deacons present recommendations to the church at business meetings. This may indicate that they handle more of the "business" of the church than the above percentages indicate. It is probably good that most pastors (84.4%) serve as moderators of the business meetings.

The Deacons' Spiritual Qualifications: (Questions 35-37)

Strife and Gossip: (Question 35)

Almost 32% of those questioned indicated that at least one deacon in their church

had been a source of strife, gossip, etc. The Chairmen of Deacons understand these problems also and are probably more acquainted with them, as indicated by the higher percentage (38.5%). Needless to say, this is wrong for any Christian and especially for the deacon (1 Timothy 3:8). Further, deacons were appointed in Acts 6 to solve problems of murmuring, not create them.

Lifestyles: (Question 36)

Approximately 10% of the respondents and the Chairmen of Deacons indicated at least one deacon in their church lived a questionable lifestyle. Unholy living and tale bearing on the part of any deacon are hard situations for a church to deal with, especially when the inappropriate activity is a negative influence to those who are lost.

Vision for Growth: (Question 37)

Only 75% of the respondents and the Chairmen of deacons estimated that their deacons had a vision for growth and building. Though this may not seem like a “spiritual” qualification, it is an indicator of a man of “faith.” Those who do not have a “vision” generally are not excited about seeing their church grow, seeing people saved, etc., and can even be an opposing factor for others who do desire this.

The Deacons’ Doctrinal Qualifications: (Questions 38-39)

About 1% of Pastors estimated that all their deacons may not believe Christ is the only way of salvation. A commendable word is offered to the Chairmen of Deacons who gave a 100% affirmation to this question. However, this doctrine may not have been

thought through to its logical conclusions. That is, only 87% of Pastors and Chairmen of Deacons could say the deacons in their churches understood that a world religion (that is, a method apart from faith in Christ) would not allow a person to go to heaven when they die. This necessarily will hinder the evangelistic efforts of those men. If people go to heaven because they are good or because they adhere to some religion, then why attempt to witness to them. One of the qualifications for a deacon is “holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience” (1 Timothy 3:9).

The Deacon and the Great Commission: (Questions 40-41)

The only statistic more shocking than the one concerning a lack of accountability of the deacons to the pastor (and/or church) are the numbers of those who have never led anyone to Christ. First, and worst, is that 5% of *pastors*, by their own admission, have never led a single soul to Christ. Similarly, 18.4% of the Chairmen of Deacons admitted that they had never led anyone to Christ. The respondents estimated that 55% of the deacon body in their respective churches had never led anyone to faith in Christ. Sharing the gospel is the mandate of the church. If this is not understood, much less practiced, how can one conceivably hope to lead others in the church?

The Deacon and Serving: (Questions 42-43)

Over 26% of the Chairmen of Deacons admitted that they are not involved in consistent ministry to people (i.e., widows, shut-ins, etc.). The respondents estimated that only 42% of the deacons in their churches were active in consistent ministry. Maybe there is not enough time left after performing their “overseeing” functions. Whatever the

reason, this apathy is a contradiction to the very nature of the office of the servant. If a man is not serving consistently, then he should voluntarily return his ordination papers and cease being called a “deacon.” Deacon means “servant,” and one accepting the office of deacon and not serving is a living hypocrite. When one accepts the office of deacon, he is accepting the responsibility to set the example for serving in his church. Maybe the reason so little ministry is taking place in the church is due to the congregation following their examples. It is not good enough to have good intentions. The New Testament speaks of men serving, not attaining a certain position of status. God bless the men who know how to “sweat” for Jesus.

Deacon Ministry and the Status of the Church: (Questions 44-45)

Contentment With Ministry: (Question 44)

Almost 53% of all respondents and all Chairmen of Deacons indicated they were not happy with their deacon ministry. The number one reason given in the written comments for this discontentment was that no ministry was being performed. The diaconate is a ministry to people. If no service is actually being performed, then the formality of the ministry should be done away with. The church does not need a group of administrators who do not work. This breeds strife and contentment.

Church Growth: (Question 45)

Likewise, and no doubt directly related to the previous problem, only less than 60% of the churches surveyed were growing. However, this is evidently an overstatement

in that SBC statistics indicate that 70% to 80% of all SBC churches are stagnant or dying. Do enough people care to make a change?

General Conclusions

It appears that many churches do not have a Biblical grasp of the person and role of the deacon. Many deacons are serving as overseers in the church which is contrary to the New Testament definition and example of the deacon. The preoccupation with administration is evidently drawing many men from their calling as servants. A large number of men are not consistently involved in ministry.

It may appear that a pessimistic approach was taken by emphasizing the negative, though smaller, statistics. However, small percentages may seem insignificant, but it must be remembered that a little leaven affects the whole (cf. Achan in Joshua 7:1-26). This is especially true if this small, but negative, group of men work themselves into primary places of leadership. A small percentage, such as twenty, indicates that two of those ten deacons may be a force to be contended with. Likewise, if one takes small percentages from each category and adds them in the same group, then the majority may be troublemakers. For instance, if two of ten deacons are wanting to be administrators, another two are living questionable lifestyles, and two do not feel they are accountable to anyone, then a bad majority has been built on small percentages. It appears, based on the surveys and the testimonies of a large number of people, that only a small percentage of men are usually involved in holding the church back. The majority are generally good men who serve the office of deacon faithfully.

There are several primary areas of weakness. A large percentage of the church not understanding the biblical mandate for deacons to be accountable to both the church and their pastor, and, a shocking percentage of both pastors and deacons have never led anyone to Christ. Many others are not consistent soul-winners or disciple makers. Also, many deacons are serving in an overseeing capacity and neglecting the ministry to which they were called--ministry to people.

Lack of training probably fosters these problems as well. Many men indicated a godly desire to serve in various areas but felt incapable. Others have refused training sessions and seminars. If a deacon is not willing to commit time and effort to personal growth and discipleship, then he should be replaced.

Though a few men may bring a bad name to the deacon ministry, there are countless others who bring glory to Christ through their good attitudes, dedicated work, and evangelistic efforts. May God bless these men.

PART THREE: PRACTICAL APPLICATION AND ROLE MODELS

CHAPTER 11
PRACTICAL CONCERNS
RELATING TO THE DEACON MINISTRY

Let all things be done decently and in order. 1 Corinthians 14:40

The Selection of Deacons for Service

The Time for Selection is a Time to be Selective

Dr. Billy J. Edmonds, the author's home pastor, has been in the ministry for almost forty years. In a personal interview with him, he stated that the selection process is one of the most important aspects relating to the deacon ministry. He believes the spiritual level the men set aside will either enhance the church's growth or hinder it to the point of extinction.

He says the men that are chosen should fully understand their purpose and not desire to "overstep their boundaries." They should be willing to support the total program of the church. They should be chosen with the pastor's approval. The men selected should understand that they are to build up their church and pastor and not tear him or the church down. The deacon's children will think the pastor and the church are great if they do not hear otherwise from their mom or dad. When parents "bad mouth," they are

demeaning the gospel. Above all, it is imperative that the men chosen be men of character. They also should be willing to care for widows or anyone else.¹

Likewise, the number of men chosen from an immediate family should be limited. It is probably good not to have more than one man from each family. This will prevent the church from being dominated by any given family. For instance, a man and three of his sons should not make up the entirety of the deacon body.

These suggestions concerning the selection process are the consummate wisdom of a man who spent many years on the field. There is no way to estimate the importance of having a well thought out method of selecting men to serve in the deacon ministry. The importance of this process is also indicated by one survey respondent who proclaimed, "Be careful in *selection*; be sure they love God and are willing to serve!" Bill Hull has surmised, "Perhaps the only germane comment is that since leaders are to be followed, their selection should be carefully made."²

Dr. W. A. Criswell tells the following story concerning an incident that occurred before he had developed an appropriate respect for the selection process. He says,

In my first little congregation I had eighteen members. I began preaching and pastoring when I was a teenager. I had read in the Bible that we were to have deacons in the church, and I was determined to obey that biblical injunction and ordain deacons. We chose three deacons to be ordained. When the time for ordination came, one of them was drunk, and he was not there. The other one was so sorry that he did not show up. We ordained the third one, and he soon fell away. That was the result of my

¹ Dr. Billy J. Edmonds, interview by author, 24 January 1995.

² Bill Hull, *The Disciple Making Pastor* (Old Tappan, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1988), 164.

adolescent immaturity as a young and inexperienced pastor.³

Thus, the principle to remember is that it is better not to have ordained leaders than to have men who are ordained but are not qualified or who are unfit. This is a truth that should be remembered by every church: It is easier to place someone in a position than to remove them from it.

The Various Methods of Selection

There are a number of ways in which a church can nominate its deacons. Some churches have had their deacons nominated by the existing deacons. Others have had the pastor nominate men for the position. Another method is to simply let the men be nominated by the church in open forum. A fourth way is to allow a nominating committee, as chosen by the church, make the recommendations.⁴

The obvious pitfall to the first method is that it is not scriptural, and it provides the opportunity for the office to become a self-perpetuating group of officers. The church is to be a part of the choosing process, not just the deacons themselves. As Foshee reminds, “The entire congregation had a voice in selecting and electing the seven.”⁵

The second carries the pitfall of only having the preacher’s favorite people serve. Though the preacher may like these men, they may not be liked by the people whom they

³ W. A. Criswell, *Great Doctrines of the Bible*, vol. 3, *Ecclesiology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1983), 97. Cited hereafter as Criswell, *Doctrines*.

⁴ Robert E. Naylor, *The Baptist Deacon* (Nashville: Broadman, 1955), 35-39.

⁵ Howard B. Foshee, *Broadman Church Manual* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1973), 104. Cited hereafter as Foshee, *BCM*.

will serve. However, no man should be ordained who does not have the full approval of the pastor. The apostles in the New Testament gave the final seal of approval through the laying on of hands. As Dr. Naylor has remarked,

Let me hasten to say that I think that no man ought to be nominated as a deacon without consulting the pastor. If there is one man in the church that is vitally interested in this selection, it is the pastor. The position to which God has called him and the confidence of the people that his leadership in the church is a work of the Holy Spirit make it necessary to consider his judgment. He is the man in whom all the church should have utmost confidence. His people regard him as a man of God, a man led of the Holy spirit. They believe that their relationship with him is born of the will of God.⁶

The third method is certainly by the people, but has several problems associated with it. If nominations are presented in a public forum, then everyone is going to know if a particular man is later found not to be qualified or is unwilling to serve. This can prove to be embarrassing, especially in a small church.

Some churches even have their nominations and election tied up in one vote. A church that uses this method simply allows the members to show up and turn in names. The ones having their name turned in the most are placed as deacons. However, this does not afford those who are on the “fringes” of the church (that is, not part of the “in crowd”) to know what is going on; they may not even know who is available for nomination. This method also allows for considerable church politics. That is, whoever recruits the most people to the meeting can elect whom they want.

An example of the problems associated with this method are seen in a story related by one of the survey respondents. Her church averages 100 to 200 in Sunday School

⁶ Naylor, 37, 38.

attendance. Their method of nomination allows people to show up, submit names, and those receiving the most votes are the deacons. The last time this process was utilized by the church, those receiving the most nominations/votes were contacted by the pastor who asked them to sign a commitment sheet. This sheet contained those things which the pastor would expect of these men. Several men did not sign this sheet and were passed over. The list was gone down until three men were chosen based on their acceptance of the responsibilities given to them. Evidently, several men who had previously served as deacons were passed by, with two new men being ordained. The lady comments, with a good spirit, that she did not think this was right.

Several things are to be considered in this case. First of all, it is important that each man did receive the support of the congregation. However, the pastor should also have the right to ask for a commitment. It was the apostles who laid hands on the first seven in Acts 6 to give final approval. If these men were not willing to serve, then they should not have been placed in office. Though the men passed over were no doubt well-liked by the congregation, being well-liked does not always equate with a willingness to serve. The lady noted that the men who did not accept were faithful in their church attendance and were trying to live good lives for the Lord. Again, while this is most commendable, the church must come to the place where they stop ordaining men simply because they are faithful to attend church. A man does not need to be ordained in order to be a faithful attender. This faithfulness is expected of all Christians. A man is to be set aside for special *service*. If a man is not committed to serving over and above his church attendance, then he should not be set aside. It appears the pastor made a wise decision in

this situation. The position of deacon is not an office to hold by those who are merely honored as faithful members; it is a position where ministry, above and beyond the average, is to be performed.

The fourth method mentioned above may be an improvement on the others but still is prone to weakness. That is, those placed on the committee may not be grounded in Scripture well enough to fully understand the requirements of a deacon.

Thus, a combination of the above methods may provide the best procedure. As Wemp suggests,

Another approach involves a screening process by the pastor and active deacons of men nominated by the members. After the screenings, a list of qualified men is presented to the congregation for a vote of the number needed.⁷

Thus, a committee should be formed, consisting of the pastor, associate pastors, and a number of active deacons. The purpose of this committee is to accept nominations from the church, screen the nominations, and then present a full list of qualified men to the church. A list of the names of those on the committee and how they may be contacted should be presented to the church so the people will know what process is to be used for making a nomination.

After this, an official screening takes place of all names turned in *before* a list of qualified men is ever presented to the church. Once a list is compiled and made available to the church, each member will then be afforded the opportunity of knowing all the available men who are eligible to serve.

⁷ C. Sumner Wemp, *The Guide to Practical Pastoring* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1982), 140.

There are several advantages to this system. One, the nomination process is not in the hands of a small self-perpetuating group. Two, names may be given to the committee privately, thus giving an unqualified nominee a chance to withdraw without public knowledge or embarrassment. Further, it avoids the politics of nominating from the floor. Finally, it allows each member of the church to be knowledgeable about all who are qualified for the position.

The following is a suggested outline of the whole process:

(1.) Names of members are turned in by individuals from the congregation and a list is compiled. The pastor should be able to survey these names to see if any are included whom he knows does not qualify. The pastor may know things about the flock that is not general public knowledge.

(2.) A letter is sent to each of these men stating the qualifications, descriptions of ministry, what the their local church expects, the commitment required, the training involved, etc. A Response Form should be included for those concerned to give an initial response of "Yes," "Maybe," or "No." Those who wish to respond "Maybe" or "Yes" should also respond to the questions in the letter concerning the basic qualifications contained therein.

(3.) Meeting(s) should be scheduled with those who respond "Yes" or "Maybe." These meetings will include detailed interviews with the candidate and his family.

(4.) The names of those qualified, who wish to accept, should make a commitment to prerequisite training. After this, their names are placed on a ballot and presented to the church. If a man is not already serving and training he should not receive serious consideration and should not be elected to serve. An understanding should exist that if he stops training and serving, he will be asked to step down. This type of evaluation should be conducted every six months.

(5.) The church votes at the appointed time.

(6.) Questioning by the Presbytery should be held long before the actual ordination is to take place.

(7.) The Ordination service is held.

(8.) Those who are elected are enrolled in training courses and/or seminars.

Again, only men who are already actively involved in serving the Lord should be considered. If this is not adhered to, only dead weight will be acquired.

The Practice of Ordination

A Biblical Example

Baptists have based their practice of ordination on biblical example. There are several acts of ordination as witnessed in the New Testament--Acts 6:6; Acts 13:1-3; 14:23; and 1 Timothy 4:14 (with 2 Timothy 1:6). Also, Titus is directed to make appointments in the church of Crete (Titus 1:5), while instructions are given by Paul to Timothy concerning the continuance of the laying on of hands (1 Timothy 5:22).

The practice of the early church in Acts 6 of setting aside the first deacons was probably based on the Old Testament example of Moses and Joshua (Numbers 27:15-23).⁸ This comparison has been shown by Lohse who has noted the strong similarities of these two passages:

a. Appointing: Num 27:16 "Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation," . . . Acts 6:3 "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;"

b. Full of Spirit: Num 27:18 "And the LORD said to Moses: 'Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him;'" . . . Acts 6:3 "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;"

c. By Preachers: Num 27:19 "set him before Eleazar the priest and

⁸ Eduard Lohse, "χείρ," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, trans. and ed. by G. W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1964-76), 9 (1974): 433, n. 55 (cited hereafter as *TDINT*) makes the following statement concerning this comparison: "Since Nu. 27:15-23 serves as a basis of ordination for the Rabb., the intentional borrowing from Nu. 27 in Ac. 6:1-6 is designed to show that the institution of the Seven is meant as Christian ordination . . ."

before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight.” . . . Acts 6:6 “whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.”

d. By Laying-on of Hands: Num 27:18 “. . . lay your hand on him;” Num 27:23 “And he laid his hands on him and inaugurated him, just as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses.” . . . Acts 6:6 “whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.”

A Baptist Definition

Baptist theologian A. H. Strong has defined ordination in the following way:

Ordination is the setting apart of a person divinely called to a work of special ministration in the church. It does not involve the communication of power,—it is simply a recognition of powers previously conferred by God, and a consequent formal authorization on the part of the church, to exercise the gifts already bestowed.⁹

Though Baptists have long held the practice of ordination, it should be noted that the modern church has probably elevated and formalized it far beyond the New Testament example. Thus, Strong says, “The word ‘ordain’ has come to have a technical signification not found in the New Testament. There it means simply to choose, appoint, set apart.”¹⁰ Dr. Paige Patterson has come to a similar conclusion:

Venturing no judgment as to whether contemporary ordination procedures are good or evil, it is sufficient to stress that no clear pattern or procedure for ordination is discernable in the New Testament. Neither can it be established that the various words translated “ordain” in the KJV mean anything more than “appoint.” Insofar as the New Testament is concerned, ordination is not a major issue, if it exists as such at all. Most churches and denominations have developed ordination beyond New

⁹ Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, three vols. in one (Old Tappan, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1907), 918.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 919.

Testament precedent in both its form and its significance.¹¹

One problem resulting from this overemphasis has been the permanence of position it has wrongfully afforded to those being ordained. That is, a thirty minute ordination service should not give a pastor or deacon the privilege of holding an office for a lifetime regardless of the quality of their service or behavior.

Those Participating in the Laying on of Hands

The question of who is to participate in the laying on of hands should be a significant concern for Baptists. It has been customary for Southern Baptist deacons to participate in the ordination of pastors and other deacons (about 87%). However, this practice is in violation of New Testament standards. For example, every ordination occurring in the New Testament was performed by elders; there are no biblical accounts of deacons being involved in the laying on of hands. This truth is especially seen in Paul's first letter to Timothy. Timothy was the pastor at Ephesus when this letter was written, and it is evident that both overseers/elders/pastors (3:1, 5:17) and deacons (3:8) were established in the church. However, only the "eldership" ("presbytery," KJV) participated in the laying on of hands (4:14).

Thus, the word "presbytery" (*presbuterion*, "group or council of elders"), as often used by Baptist churches, specifically excludes the possibility of deacons participating in ordination services. This is true because deacons are not elders and therefore are not a

¹¹ L. Paige Patterson, "The Meaning of Authority in the Local Church," chapter in *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 1991), 251.

part of the eldership. Thus, as McConnell states,

Only the preachers did the ordaining. There has grown up an almost universal practice, among Baptist, of inviting deacons to be members of presbyteries to ordain deacons and even preachers. Such practice has no Scriptural support. It ought to be discontinued. Nowhere in the New Testament was a deacon called a presbyter.¹²

Further, since deacons are not overseers, it is not in the nature of their calling to participate in the “appointing” of officers in the church. Ordination has a symbolic meaning, showing that those entrusted by God to shepherd the church are delegating responsibility and giving approval of the ones being set aside. Though this may be quite shocking, it is nevertheless true.

And, finally, if the church decides to ask someone from outside their local church to participate, the questioning of the candidate should not be placed on the afternoon of the actual ordination. This could prove to be embarrassing for the church, the candidate, and all the family and friends involved. If it is found that the candidate does not qualify, the ceremony has already been planned.

The Duration of Deacons in Service

Though many contend that a deacon is ordained for life, there is still no good reason for not implementing a deacon rotation system. If a man is ordained as a pastor by a particular church, he does not expect to serve there endlessly, regardless of his quality of work or the wish of the congregation. Just because one is ordained does not guarantee the continued and perpetual holding of the office in a particular church. The following is a

¹² F. M. McConnell, *McConnell's Manual for Baptist Churches* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1926), 91-92.

discussion of some of the more practical aspects of a system for deacon rotation.

The Rotating System

The practice of deacon rotation has become standard in Baptist churches.¹³ The explanation of deacon rotation has been given by Robert Naylor, pastor, teacher, and past president of Southwestern Seminary:

It means that a man is asked to serve with a group of active deacons for a period of, say, three years. At the end of that time, his term is concluded, and he continues to serve only if re-elected by the church.¹⁴

A related issue to the idea of rotation is when one transfers membership from one church to another. This is, in a sense, a rotation, because no one should expect to automatically serve as a deacon in a new church just because he has previously served elsewhere. Baptist professor and theologian, J. Clyde Turner once stated,

Much is to be said in favor of the rotating system for deacons. And it certainly is not true that, because a man is suited for the deaconship in one church, he is therefore suited for the deaconship in any other church.¹⁵

There appears to be much wisdom in the words of a man who has been a pastor for over sixty years,

It has never been my privilege to be the pastor of a church that rotated the membership of its fellowship of deacons. But I can tell you positively and certainly that you will have a better and a stronger leadership for the church if you will rotate the men. When a man is elected for life, he may take things for granted--his attendance upon the meetings, his service in

¹³ Naylor, 52.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ J. Clyde Turner, *The New Testament Doctrine of the Church* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1951), 62.

behalf of the people, his leadership in the congregation. A man may be one thing at thirty years of age and an altogether different thing at sixty years of age. If his life, work, and service are never reviewed, he can fall into any kind of disinterest, and nothing can ever be done about it. No political or business institution in the world would do a thing like that, never review the people who run the organization. You will find that only in the church.¹⁶

With all possibilities considered, it seems unwise not to have a rotation system for the deacon fellowship.

Naylor states the advantages of the rotating system is that it allows for new blood and it eliminates those not doing their job.¹⁷ Sumner Wemp has also suggested this system in his *Guide to Practical Pastoring*. The quote from his book will provide an apt summary for this section:

How long should a deacon serve? For years it was thought that a deacon should serve the rest of his life. In some churches, seniority has been treated the same as in the U.S. Senate: the older, the more powerful. This surely is not a scriptural concept.

I recommend the 'rotating system.' With this set-up, a deacon serves actively for three years and then has a year off. After a year, if he still meets the qualifications, the man is eligible to be reelected to active deacon service. Three good reasons for this system should be considered.

1. It gets new blood into the diaconate. New ideas from younger men often are helpful. Sometimes deacons who serve for life get into a rut, howbeit unintentionally. Often very godly men are shut out from being of great service to the Lord because the diaconate is a closed fellowship.

2. This system removes a tradition-bound or cantankerous deacon in the gentlest way possible. Many churches are tragically hindered by unspiritual deacons who are full of pride and untouchable because of a policy of lifetime deacon service.

3. While off the active board, a man often sees anew how the deacons appear from the other side of the fence. It can be very revealing. With that

¹⁶ W. A. Criswell, *Criswell's Guidebook for Pastors* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1980), 224-25. Cited hereafter as Criswell, *Guidebook*.

¹⁷ Naylor, 55.

view also comes a healthy attitude when one is reelected. Also, after a year the man is reevaluated to see if he still qualifies. Sometimes it becomes apparent that he has changed and no longer should serve as a deacon.¹⁸

The Methods Used for Rotating

Regardless of what system is used to begin the rotation system, it should be determined and agreed on that a certain number of deacons will roll-off each year. This allows for the rotation of those coming on and going off to be handled in a systematic way. An equal number should rotate each year. To determine who will rotate the first year this begins, Naylor has suggested, "If a three year-system has been decided on, perhaps the fairest way is to let those receiving the greatest number of votes be three-year men, the second group two-year men, and the last group one-year men."¹⁹

Likewise, it should be agreed that each man rotating out of the deacon fellowship not be eligible to return for at least one year. The wisdom behind this is that, "If he is eligible to succeed himself immediately, not being re-elected is a personal affront."²⁰ Not only this, but having a year off provides a good opportunity to check the level of his commitment to service--does he serve regardless of his position.

The Content of Deacons Meetings

The content of the deacon's meeting is a reflection of the philosophy and attitudes the deacons and the church have concerning deacon ministry. As is noted throughout

¹⁸ Wemp, 139-40.

¹⁹ Naylor, 54.

²⁰ Ibid, 55.

Scripture and in this paper, there is no instance of deacons ever being responsible for the overseeing of the church or for approving the business of the church. Therefore, the deacon's meeting should have nothing to do with the overall business affairs of the church. It should focus on how to better minister to people.

However, many deacons' meetings focus entirely on business with ministry having no place in the agenda. If so, the necessary changes will only come when the issue is dealt with purposefully. The situation is not going to change automatically. A conscious decision must be made to change; a commitment must be made to develop a new schedule for the meetings. Hence, the following discussion by Foshee is given to provoke thought:

Many deacon chairmen set aside a portion of each deacons meeting for *training* deacons in the skills necessary for serving more effectively.

The chairman also is responsible for keeping deacons well *informed* and highly *motivated*. He calls for *regular* reports from each deacon on his family list. Deacons' meetings can provide moments of genuine *worship* as deacons report their experiences during the past month. Time for *sharing* victories, celebrating Christian *fellowship*, and *praying* for special needs of specific persons or families should be provided for each deacon meeting. [emphasis added]²¹

A more specific schedule is given by Herb Pedersen in his deacon training video packet *A Deacon Ministry That Works*.²² He suggests the following:

1. *Devotional* (5 to 10 minutes) - Scripture, testimony, prayer, etc.
2. *Training* (20 to 30 minutes) - Come to grips with difficult situations, articles, guest speakers.

²¹ *BCM*, 107.

²² Herb Pedersen, *A Deacon Ministry That Works*, Teacher's Manual, "Workbook," Session 5, pp. 20-23; Compiled by Larry Garner and Tony Martin (Sampson Ministry Resources, 5050 Quorum, Suite 245; Dallas, Tx. 75240 (214) 387-2806), 1989. Distributed by: Church Growth Institute P.O. Box 4404, Lynchburg, VA. 24502; videocassette and workbook.

3. *Sharing* (20 to 30 minutes) - Turn in ministry reports, share needs of people and self, share hopes and dreams.
4. *Prayer* (20 to 30 minutes) - Should probably be the most lengthy section. Call requests one by one.
5. *Business of Deacons* (3 to 5 minutes) - Deacons make no recommendation to the church. Business is handled through church committees. Chairman must plan this and keep close control.

In order to investigate the content of the deacons meeting, Pedersen also gives the following work sheet (abridged):

Examine the following two schedules:

Schedule A

- 7:00-7:15 Opening prayer and devotion
- 7:15-7:45 Training: view video - "A Deacon Ministry That Works"
- 7:45-8:10 Sharing of ministry reports
- 8:10-8:30 Prayer
- 8:30-8:35 Miscellaneous business

Schedule B

- 7:00-7:02 Opening prayer by chairman
- 7:02-7:30 Old business: sub-committee report on cost overruns for roof repair on fellowship hall
- 7:30-8:30 New business: examine financial statement, discuss paving the lower parking lot, present bids for cleaning nursery carpet
- 8:30-8:40 Ministerial staff reports
- 8:40-8:57 Floor fight breaks out for no apparent reason
- 8:57-9:00 Motion to adjourn and closing prayer by the pastor²³

If Schedule B is more typical of the deacons' meeting in a given church, then it can be safely assumed that ministry is at a standstill. The old "deacon board" mentality prevails.

To conclude, it is important to recognize that although change is needed, it may take an extended period of time. As Pedersen testifies,

I have found out across the years that churches will make 180 degree turns . . . but I promise you they're going to make them 10 degrees at a

²³ Ibid., Session 6, 25-26.

time. Don't try any 90 degree turns, they don't work very well in Baptist churches.²⁴

One should be determined to make needed changes, but only in the spirit of prayer, caution, and wisdom.

²⁴ Ibid., Session 3, videocassette.

CHAPTER 12
ROLE MODELS IN DEACON MINISTRY

Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. *Philippians 3:17*

Introduction

The following churches have been selected as role models because of both the biblical foundations and the fruitfulness of their ministries. Though other churches could have been selected, these seemed to best exemplify the principle arguments of this paper. Needless to say, these churches are not perfect, but they are making valiant efforts to function according to kingdom standards. The following is a summary of each church's deacon ministry. The reader is directed to the full interviews conducted with both the pastor and chairman of deacons in each church, as presented in *Appendix G: Transcripts of the Interviews with Role Model Churches*.

A Survey of Three Role Model Churches

First Baptist Church, Brownsville, Texas

Church Profile. First Brownsville averages about 480 in Sunday School with about twice that number in Morning Worship. Pastor Kenny Lewis has been there for 14

years. Jim Steenland is presently serving as Chairman of Deacons.

When Pastor Lewis came to the church, they were heavily indebted. Since then they have not only paid their debts off but have about a million dollar per year budget and have saved almost another million dollars for new facilities. However, this has all been accomplished with placing ministry first. They have started about eleven mission churches, nine of them in Mexico. The church still meets in the auditorium of the Christian school they built several years ago. They have founded an orphanage that is now self-supporting. These are only a few of the ministries they perform. Thus, they do have a heart for ministry, and thus a need for deacons. Those who have a heart for ministry will take advantage of the opportunities around them. Brownsville has two other distinctions also: they are the southern most town in the United States, and they are the poorest town per capita in the United States.

The Nature of the Deacon Ministry. FBC as a whole understands that the deacon is a servant not an overseer. They do not have a “board” of deacons.

The Role of the Pastor. Likewise, they understand that the pastors have been assigned by God to be the primary leaders in the church. The church constitution reflects ample evidence that the Senior Pastor is to be the primary administrator of the church. His authority is checked by the opportunity of the church to make final decisions if necessary. Pastor Lewis has honored this biblical freedom by serving the church with a godly wisdom, love, and service. The church enjoys harmony and unity in their growth.

The Function of the Deacon Ministry. The deacons at Brownsville do not have a specific job description. The church wants to emphasize ministry based on individual

spiritual gifts and abilities, rather than programs. They consider themselves the “body” of Christ. Each man is faithful, however, not only in soul-winning, but in the entire disciple-making process, helping new believers mature in Christ. They have taken responsibility for organizing and serving several yearly dinners at the church, which is a significant undertaking. Each of the deacons are highly committed in serving their church.

The Change in Procedure. The church has not always had such a biblical deacon ministry. Changes occurred in the earlier years of Pastor Kenny’s ministry at the church. Bro. Jim says that a few men did not share a biblical perspective of deacon ministry and later left the ministry. He says that is all behind them now and something they do not dwell on. This positive change came through a consistent and well-balanced teaching of the Word of God. Brownsville is a church that wants Scripture to be the final authority in their faith and practice.

The Selection Process. Brownsville has a selection committee that carefully screens each possible candidate. Pastor Lewis says he has been proud of those serving in this capacity because tremendous pressures have been put on them by church members who wanted a particular individual to be a deacon. He says they have lovingly but staunchly defended their ground. The policy of the church is that if the spiritual and practical qualifications are not met, a man does not serve--regardless of business experience or wealth. All of this process receives a tremendous amount of prayer. Prayer is a major key in maintaining spiritual ministry. The whole church has a definite commitment to actually praying, not just talking about prayer. Again, this is the key.

The Deacons’ Meetings. Pastor Lewis realizes many pastors have to “recover”

from their deacons' meetings. However, he states that their deacons' meetings are one of the most positive and edifying experiences in his ministry. They are filled with fellowship, prayer, Scripture quotation, and vision making. On occasion they spend a small amount of time discussing matters concerning the church. Pastor Lewis says these men are some of the most godly in his church, and many times he desires their wisdom on certain matters. He states, however, that they do not even want to function as financial overseers in the church. This problem that is so prevalent in many churches is not even an issue with these men. They have found the joy of a Spirit-filled life of ministry.

The Fruit of a Biblical Deacon Ministry. Pastor Lewis considers these men to be his best friends. He really does depend on them. When this interview was conducted, he shared that he had just been through one of his darkest hours. He said it was his friends, the deacons, that helped walk him through it. The deacons at FBC are men who can help because of their deep spiritual lives and commitment and knowledge of ministering to people. Also, they can be called upon because they are friends and can be trusted. Pastor Kenny believes they are invaluable to the church's ministry. He also encourages pastors to pray for men who will be committed to growing and being disciplined in the Lord. If he will spend time discipling these men, he can cultivate some of the sweetest blessings imaginable.

First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Georgia

Church Profile. First Baptist Church of Woodstock averages about 2,800 in Sunday School attendance. The church has grown significantly over the past years since

Dr. Johnny Hunt became their pastor. Associate Pastor Ken Smith states that of the 4,000 plus additions to the church in the past several years, almost half have been conversions. The church is in a constant state of growth and is involved in a multitude of ministries. The church enjoys harmony and is one of the model churches of the Southern Baptist Convention. Rhon Redwine is presently serving as Chairman of Deacons. He is a committed, godly layman who loves the Lord. (It is interesting that when the author contacted him by phone, he was deeply caught up in a devotional work by Oswald Chambers. Praise God for men who walk with Jesus!)

The Nature of the Deacon Ministry. Woodstock understands the deacon is a servant, first and last.

The Role of the Pastor. FBC also understands the priority of the pastor in responsibility and authority for leading the church. The church constitution makes it clear that he is the primary administrator of the church. Pastor Hunt is a godly pastor and tremendous soul-winner. Each of the pastors are recognized as primary leaders in their respective areas of ministry.

The Function of the Deacon Ministry. The deacons at FBC have no administrative responsibilities at all concerning the overall function of the church. They are heavily involved in one of three areas of ministry: Care, Share, and/or Prayer. These are respectively, ministry to the hurting and sick, the lost, and/or leading concerts of prayer throughout the church. Pastor Ken Smith states that many men do not accept the position of deacon because of the large amount of time required in ministry. They rotate in order to give the men serving a breather. It is fully acceptable by the pastors and deacons for a

man to step down in order to address an unforeseen family problem, etc. Being a deacon at Woodstock does require time. Pastor Smith states they are wonderful men who can be called upon at any time for help and support. If the deacon on call cannot immediately come, he will contact other deacons until he finds one who can. He says they are wonderful, invaluable servants.

The Change in Procedure. The deacon ministry prior to Pastor Hunt coming on staff basically functioned as a “deacon board.” Smith states that it was just an average Baptist church on the corner, that ran a few hundred in Sunday School. The change to functioning as a ministry began in a weekend deacon’s retreat. Pastor Hunt asked the men to list all the responsibilities they were performing, then they did a verse by verse study of the Scriptures. As they did, each function they had that was not biblical was marked off the board. Very few “ministries” were left in the end. The change from administrating to ministry and service was hard, especially on those who had been accustomed to “running” the church. Some left.

Another change occurred in that the previous practice of the church had been to ordain those who had been divorced. However, as these rotated off, they understood they would not be asked to come back on. Pastor Smith states that the overwhelming majority of these men remained in the church and are still some of the key members of the church. He says they still serve as hard as ever. What a testimony to having a true servants heart!

The Selection Process. The Pastor has the right to remove the name of any man that he personally knows to be unqualified. A committee is also responsible for conducting personal interviews with each candidate. A high standard is maintained and is

not lowered merely to have a certain “quota” of deacons serving. If a man does not possess the spiritual and practical qualifications of a deacon, he does not serve.

It is also a policy of the church not to ordain men who are members of the Masonic Lodge. They feel the secretive nature of the organization and its generic view of God does not accord with New Testament doctrine. If someone believes that all religions are equally good for preparing a man for heaven, then he has missed the whole intent and teaching of the New Testament concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ. Thus, his effectiveness as a soul-winner will be greatly diminished. The church has strong convictions about the biblical mandate to make disciples of all nations by sharing Jesus Christ. Continuous Witness Training (CWT) is a major part of the church’s training program for everyone in the church. Therefore, all of the pastors and deacons lead the way in personally and consistently leading persons to Christ.

The Deacons’ Meetings. The deacons meet regularly to discuss their responsibilities in ministry. They often meet without any of the pastors because they are not involved in any of the church “business.” Pastors certainly may attend if they desire to do so but have entrusted them to be responsible enough to carry out their ministry. Likewise, they are self disciplining. Pastor Smith states that a “new” deacon stood in a deacons meeting and stated that the “Pastor ought to do so and so.” Immediately, a whole room full of men began to pray for him. Divine intervention and tremendous peer pressure redirected this man’s thinking almost immediately. The leadership in the deacon body subsequently explained to him that it was not the deacon’s position to be concerned with such matters. He ended up being a fine deacon.

The Fruit of A Biblical Deacon Ministry. The church at Woodstock has gone from several hundred to several thousand. It is a tremendous light in the community. Whereas it was previously bound by deacon administration, it is now wonderfully and beautifully cared for by these men of God. The church is blessed by their presence. The pastors are helped tremendously (i.e., the deacons handle all hospital and emergency calls during non-office hours of the church, unless the situation demands a pastor.). What a blessing.

First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida

Church profile. First Baptist Church has as their co-pastors Dr. Homer G. Lindsay, Jr. and Dr. Jerry Vines. Pastor Lindsay's father was pastor at the church for many years prior to bringing his son on as co-pastor. The church has about 15,000 enrolled in Sunday School with an average attendance of about 6,500; they often have as many as 8,000 attending. A driving force in downtown Jacksonville and the surrounding areas, the church reaches the community through various ministries and consistent visitation programs.

The Nature of the Deacon Ministry. FBC understands the deacon to be a servant. Again, in this growing church the deacons do not serve as overseers of the church affairs.

The Role of the Pastors. Pastor Lindsay and Pastor Vines provide strong, but godly, leadership for the church. In the right sense of the word, the church is pastor-led. One secretary, Mrs. Gray, recognizes the willingness of the church and the deacons to let the pastors give direction to the church. She says the strong leadership they provide has

been a key to the church's growth. She likewise noted that the pastors are godly men who love and support their deacons. There is a spirit of happy, family harmony in the church.

The Function of the Deacon Ministry. The primary time spent at church by the deacon is the same as for all other Christians, including faithful work in Sunday School, attendance in worship services, and weekly visitation. When a man is faithful in this, he is already busy. Therefore, the church does not attempt to have a Deacon Family Ministry Plan; the church is too large. Additionally, the deacons are responsible for staffing ten committees at the church, including the Invitation Counseling Committee, the Collection Committee, the Greeting and Ushering Committee, the Counting Committee, the Finance Committee, the Benevolence Committee, the Baptism Committee, the Hospitality Committee, the Discipline Committee, and the Lord's Supper Committee.

Though they are involved on these committees, they still understand it is not their job to oversee, even concerning the finances. Bro. Whittaker readily admits that they are not a "board" and do not attempt to function as such. Selected men serve to formulate the budget and then present it at a deacons meeting each year for any suggestions for improvement.

The Deacons' Meetings. Bro. Whittaker states that at their last deacons' meeting the budget was presented and approved in less than 15 minutes. The rest of the time was spent sharing testimonies about whom they had led to the Lord, with much joy, prayer, and excitement. Pastor Lindsay states that most meetings are like a miniature revival. The deacons only meet when necessary, not wanting to take any more from the men's family time than necessary. Pastor Lindsay says this idea was suggested years ago by the

deacons and was one that was readily accepted by him.

The Selection Process. Nominations for deacons are taken by the men's Sunday School Department and others. However, any man not heavily involved in Sunday School would never receive serious consideration. Again, the nominations are screened by the pastors and a selection committee.

The Fruit of a Biblical Deacon Ministry. The FBC baptizes a large number of people every year. This is due in part to the visitation carried on by faithful members, many of whom also serve as deacons. Bro. Whittaker, when asked about his personal involvement in sharing Christ, estimated that he had personally been involved in leading more than a thousand to Christ. What a blessing!

Conclusion

All of the above churches are growing and have exciting deacon ministries. The reader may reference the full interviews to glean further details, but it is apparent that these three churches have several principles in common. Each has incorporated the basic biblical principle of pastors leading and deacons serving. They function well together, in part no doubt, due to their understanding of this basic philosophy of ministry. Each church holds high requirements for its deacons, having a thorough screening process to eliminate anyone who would simply want to hold an office. If a man is not already highly committed in the life of the church, he would not be considered. After accepting the position, he is accountable to continue this service. If he doesn't, he is asked to step down. Jacksonville has not gone through a significant change, due to already having a

system developed for some years, but the other two churches had to be transformed from a board mentality to a servant mentality. May God bless these churches.

CHAPTER 13

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

2 Timothy 2:15

Conclusive Remarks

According to evidence presented in the previous chapters, there is an apparent lack of biblical principle and practice associated with the modern deacon ministry. This lack has led to an ironic twisting of roles in the churches, resulting in confusion, hurt feelings, and failing ministries. Such chaos will continue unless definite measures are taken to restore the Scriptural foundations. Restoration, however, is not possible based on the current philosophies presented in most Southern Baptist literature. Unless there is a clear definition of biblically based roles, deacon boards will continue to dominate the local church environment.

The structure that is needed, delineating both the overseeing function of the pastor and the serving function of the deacon, must be accompanied by stressing servant-oriented attitudes for all church leadership. Jesus recognized authority structures and servanthood; denying the former impedes organization while ignoring the latter breeds a harsh spirit.

To have one without the other will result in a dysfunctional church environment.

The remedy for this situation is found in the spiritual nature of the Christian church. Spiritual alignment with Christ is the primary answer to this problem. Such alignment will include accepting the clearly defined roles of church leadership as given by Jesus in His Word. To ignore these directives is to ignore Him and His answer to the organizational problem. Additionally, the spirit of the church will be healed when its members (Galatians 5:16-26), pastors (Acts 4:8), and deacons (Acts 6:3, 10; 7:55) renew their personal walk in the Spirit. It is only when one is living a repentant, obedient life that he or she can hear the voice of God. In the author's opinion, this is the ultimate answer to the problem. Without a clear focus on God and His mission, His church will wander aimlessly as did the children of Israel who refused to follow Moses to the Promised Land.

Consequently, a fresh alignment with the New Testament is needed to break the rigid pattern created by one hundred and fifty years of tradition. Congregational polity appears to be the New Testament model, but its present practice in many Southern Baptist churches needs to be evaluated and adjusted. With this in mind, a suggested model for congregational church ministry will be presented. This model illustrates the position and ministry of the deacon within the larger framework of the church. Although it will not be ideal for every body of believers, hopefully it will be of some help in gaining a new perspective.

A Suggested Model of Organization Within a Congregational Church Polity

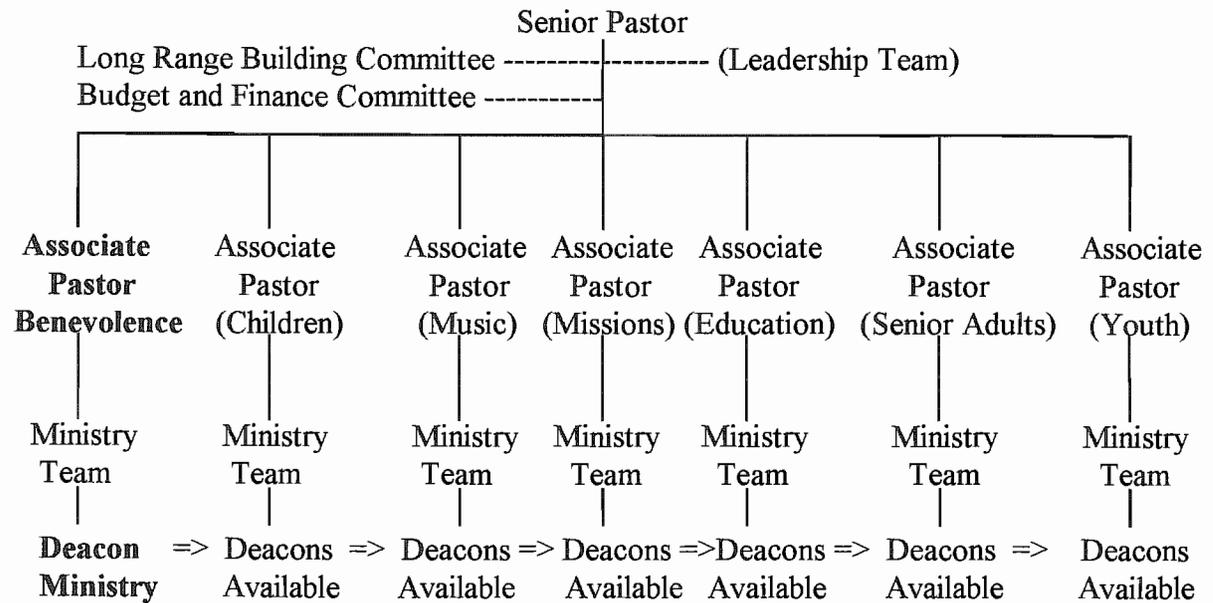


Figure A. Suggested Church Organizational Chart

The Role of the Senior Pastor and the Pastoral Staff

The Senior Pastor should have the authority to administrate the church staff. He also should have the prerogative to dismiss any volunteer worker, staff member, or other personnel. This would include deacons, team members, Sunday School teachers, directors of programs, etc. No person should be placed in any leadership position against the advice of the Senior Pastor.

The ministries associated with each Associate Pastor's position are in parenthesis to reflect the optional needs of a given church. The church should be led primarily by the pastoral staff, in cooperation with faithful church members who serve in each area. This

would allow for lay involvement, but suggestions for ministry could be reviewed and coordinated through the respective pastor serving in that area. Thus, only major issues would need to be brought before the church for discussion. These might include calling the Senior Pastor, approving the annual budget, making major expenditures on such items as buildings, land, etc., approving major policies, or addressing major problems. No business should be brought before the church without the approval of the Senior Pastor. The only business items to be brought before the church are items that have been reviewed by him and the appropriate staff and have received their approval. There is probably no need for more than one or two regularly scheduled business meetings per year. Others, if needed, could be called at the discretion of the Senior Pastor or by a majority petition of the church.

The Role of the Deacon Ministry

When a church determines the need for a deacon ministry, it will be best to have them working with and under the supervision of the church's Associate Pastor of Benevolence. If a church is smaller and does not have an Associate Pastor(s), then the deacon ministry should be accountable to and under the administration of the pastor.

The Associate Pastor of Benevolence may choose to have a Ministry Team made up of the deacons (or possibly others) to help organize this ministry. However, the Associate Pastor, in conjunction with the Senior Pastor, is to choose this Team. Each deacon may want to have a Yoke fellow with whom to work and train for ministry. Yoke fellows are not deacons but members desiring to serve God in this area.

Deacons do not fill any administrative function for the overall church; they are in no way involved in the overseeing, administrating, or general supervising of the entire church. As a deacon body, they do not vote, approve committee work, supervise pastors or staff members, or oversee any other business of this nature. This is the job of the pastors. The diaconate consists of servants, given to minister to the needs of people and to serve the church and its pastors in whatever way necessary.

Caring for the helpless should be a major job of the church and will no doubt be one of the greatest open doors for verbally sharing the gospel of Christ. Helping the poor and needy as commanded in Scripture should be the primary focus of deacons. Accordingly, the deacons may be entrusted with a significant portion of the church's budget, depending on the desire of the church to minister to those in need. They are to handle and spend, under the direction of an assigned pastor, that portion of the budget set aside for such purposes. The deacon body is not responsible for administering the entire budget of the church. They are to serve by visiting, helping, and caring for the needs of widows, single mothers, the poor, the helpless and the hurting. They are to organize and carry out ministry to people.

Deacons should be available, based on their individual gifts, to assist each Pastor and be willing to serve the church under their direction. This availability is important because deacons were set aside to help the church by ministering to their pastors. When everyday menial tasks keep the pastors from the primary goal of sharing the gospel and equipping the saints to share the gospel, then deacons may be called in for help. Work done for the church in general by the deacons should be coordinated through the

Associate Pastor of Benevolence. This procedure will prevent jobs from being indiscriminately assigned to the deacons who need time to spend on their primary ministry, helping the poor.

Other ministry opportunities might include praying at various church services, setting an example of spiritual service before the congregation. Deacons may or may not be involved in serving the Lord's Supper since this could be carried out by the pastors. Deacons are not, however, to be involved in the laying on of hands. Ordination in Scripture is always performed by the presbytery or "eldership" (1 Timothy 4:14).

A deacon may serve on the Finance committee, the Leadership Team, or he may be a source of wisdom for the Pastor; however, he would do so as a member, not as a deacon. A deacon should not expect or demand to serve in any capacity merely because he is a deacon. Any such opportunities are to be based on his faithful service as a church member. A deacon is highly esteemed due to the faithful and selfless service rendered, not because of "holding" a special lifetime office.

The Role of the Leadership Team

The Purpose of the Leadership Team

The Leadership Team is to consist of lay persons selected each year by the Senior Pastor. As lay leaders, their purpose is for fellowship, discipleship, prayer, and familiarizing the Pastor with the ideas and opinions of the flock. This input is non-binding and does not carry authority to lead the church. The Team is accountable to the corporate body of staff pastors, as the shepherds of God. The Leadership Team would usually meet

separately with the pastor but, on occasion, may be invited to meet with the church staff. During their period of service, the Pastor would have a special chance to disciple and be disciplined by those who serve. This Team's existence would also be optional, depending on the pastor's desire and on church and personal circumstances.

The Nature of the Leadership Team

The Leadership Team is not to be considered a board of "lay-elders." According to the New Testament, an elder is someone who has been called to preach and enters the "ministry." They are gifted with one of the Ephesians 4:11 gifts (apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor-teacher). Scripture suggests that both the apostles (1 Peter 5:1; 2 John 1; 3 John 1) and the pastors (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-3; Titus 1:5-9) were elders. The terms elder, bishop (overseer), and pastor (shepherd) are used interchangeably in the New Testament

The plural for elders in Scripture refers to large citywide churches, which no doubt called for more than "one" pastor. This situation is the equivalent of the multipastor staff of today. It is a group of "pastors," not a group of laymen who make up this plurality of elders. Every elder should be a preacher, who is chosen, called, and ordained by God. Thus, there is no biblical precedence for having lay elders.

The Role of Ministry Teams

Ministry Teams should be chosen by Associate Pastors in conjunction with other staff members and the Senior Pastor. The Associate Pastors should know best who is gifted and faithful in their areas of ministry. The Ministry Team is responsible to the

Associate Pastor in charge of that area of ministry. These Teams are not authoritative but serve in a non-binding advisory capacity. They are there to support, love, help, pray, brainstorm, and work. Likewise, the Ministry Team is optional, only to be formed at the discretion of the pastoral staff. It would be wise for the Associate Pastors to rotate their Team members each year. This will give the Pastors an opportunity to disciple many people who are gifted and have a heart for ministry in their areas.

The Associate Pastors and their Teams may occasionally need deacons to assist them in their area of ministry (i.e., special projects, etc.). As mentioned above, requests for such service should be coordinated through the Associate Pastor of benevolence.

The Role of the Finance and Building Committees

Churches generally need fewer committees. Two committees, however, may still be important. The church needs to have these committees to make sure that financial matters are handled honestly and that sufficient plans can be made for growth and expansion. The final recommendations for persons to serve on these committees should come from the Senior Pastor, though names could be submitted by the pastoral staff and/or church members. These committees, nominated by the Senior Pastor, should be approved by the church in one of its regularly scheduled business sessions. These committees would in turn, with the Pastor's approval, bring recommendations to the church body concerning the yearly budget and other major financial expenditures of the church. Additionally, the church may want to be a member of the *Evangelical Council on Financial Accountability (ECFA)* to ensure that financial integrity is maintained.

Congregational Participation

This model clearly maintains a congregational polity, having the final seat of authority remaining with the congregation. The congregation has authority to replace their leadership by dismissing the Senior Pastor. Also, they approve the yearly budget and are involved in the major issues affecting the church. There is further congregational participation in all areas of the church through the Leadership Team, the Ministry Teams, and through ministry responsibilities. Further, the congregation has both the privilege and responsibility to pray and to witness to others of God's grace. Accordingly, the priesthood of the believer is recognized as a responsibility more than a privilege.

However, this model also preserves the New Testament directive for pastors to oversee the church. Entrusted with the guidance and leadership of the church, they bring only major issues to the church body for approval. This approach eliminates wasted time, bickering, fighting, and strife. The purpose of the business meeting is not for individuals to randomly make major suggestions about the direction of the church--it is to affirm that the leadership provided by the pastor and pastoral staff is biblical and wise. This is the only New Testament model of congregational polity--the pastors present issues to the church and the church gives godly consent. If the church feels that a motion made by the pastoral leadership is not biblical, they are to say "No." In this model the Pastor is either leading properly or he is not. If he is, then he needs to be trusted; if he is not, he needs to be replaced. The basic motto of this model is, "Let godly leadership lead."

The difference between this model and the typical Southern Baptist approach is simple. In line with New Testament teaching and practice, this model allows for a pastor-

led church. The practice of pure democracy in association with a people-led church is sorely lacking in biblical support. The congregation was involved in the decisions of the New Testament church as indicated by the examples offered above. But, a people-led church, while recognizing congregational participation, is not supported in Scripture. While congregational participation is right, it is wrong when implemented as a pure democracy. Thus, the distinction being made within the congregational system is not one of kind but one of degree. The biblical model is not a people-led church in cooperation with the pastor, but a pastor-led church in cooperation with the people. The pastor, by God-ordained design, is to be in the driver's seat.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

DOES ACTS 6:1-7 PRESENT THE CHURCH'S FIRST DEACONS?

APPENDIX A

DOES ACTS 6:1-7 PRESENT THE CHURCH'S FIRST DEACONS?

Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. {2} 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. {3} "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; {4} "but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." {5} And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, {6} whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. {7} 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.

Acts 6:1-7

Introduction

There has been general disagreement over the relationship Acts 6:1-7 has to the official deacon ministry. Obviously deacons are found in later church history (i.e., 1 Timothy 3:8-13; Philippians 1:1), but it is not clear whether Acts 6 presents the origin of that ministry. Therefore, it is important to determine what relationship, if any, there is between this narrative in Luke's history and the diaconate.

For many churches, at least in Baptist life, this passage has provided a major part of the foundation for their existing deacon ministries. Nevertheless, the validity of any

doctrine or practice in the Christian church needs to be tested in light of Scripture. If it is found wanting, it should be discarded. A thorough examination of the text, however, may indeed prove that the diaconate was conceived in the infant church at Jerusalem as recorded in Acts 6. If so, then Baptists have a Scriptural basis for their long held beliefs.

Two Basic Arguments

There are two basic arguments presented by those who deny any link between Acts 6:1-7 and the official deacon ministry. Firstly, the new servants are never actually called “deacons.” Secondly, the later ministries of these men indicate they were not “deacons” but “preachers.” As a representation of this view, the writings of Hermann Beyer and Gordon Fee will be cited. Beyer asserts in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*:

Appeal is frequently made to Ac. 6 in explanation of the rise of the diaconate, though the term *diakonos* is not actually used. On this view, the deacons undertake practical service as distinct from the ministry of the Word. It is to be noted, however, that the Seven are set alongside the Twelve as representatives of the Hellenists, and that they take their place with the evangelists and apostles in disputing, preaching and baptizing. This fact shows that the origin of the diaconate is not to be found in Ac. 6.¹

A similar argument is presented by Fee in his commentary, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, in the *New International Biblical Commentary*:

An appeal to Acts 6:1-6 is of no value, since those men are not called deacons. In fact they are clearly ministers of the Word among Greek-speaking Jews, who eventually accrue the title “the Seven” (Acts 21:8),

¹ Hermann W. Beyer, “*diakonos*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, trans. and ed. by G. W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1964-76), 2 (1964): 90.

which distinguishes them in a way similar to “the Twelve.”²

The Argument Based on Terminology

Concerning the first argument, it is to be noted that the text does not apply to the seven the ecclesiastical term “deacon” (*diakonos*). However, the cognate noun, *diakonia* (“distribution”), is used in verse one.³ The verb form, *diakonein*, is used in verse two, and is translated “serve.” Thus, based on the use of these derivatives to describe the work of the “seven,” scholars have offered lexical, functional, comparative, and historical arguments to connect this passage with the office of deacon.

A Consideration of the Lexical Evidence

J. B. Lightfoot, in his classic commentary on *Philippians*, considers the use of these derivatives in Acts 6 to clearly indicate the origin of the deacon ministry. He says,

I have assumed that the office thus established represents the later diaconate; for though this point has been much disputed, I do not see how the identity of the two can reasonably be called in question. If the word deacon does not occur in the passage, yet the corresponding verb and substantive, διακονειν and διακονια, are repeated more than once.⁴

Likewise, A. T. Robertson concluded, based on the use of *diakonein* in verse two, that,

it is quite possible, even probable, that the office of deacon as separate from bishop or elder grew out of this incident in Acts 6:1-7. Furneaux is

² Gordon Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, in the *New International Biblical Commentary* (Peabody: Hendrickson Pub., 1988), 86.

³ The same cognate, *diakonia*, is used in connection with the apostles in verse four, where they devote themselves to the “ministry” of the Word.

⁴ Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (Lynn, Mass.: Hendrickson Pub., Inc., 1981), 188.

clear that these ‘seven’ are not to be identified with the later ‘deacons’ but why he does not make clear.⁵

Diakonia, as used in verse one, is also closely aligned with the diaconate. Liddell and Scott, in their *Greek-English Lexicon*, cite one meaning of *diakonia* as “the office of a deacon.”⁶ *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* also lists “the office of a deacon” as one meaning, based on its use in Romans 12:7.⁷ And, finally, C. E. B. Cranfield indicates there is a high probability that the technical use of the derivatives coincides with the technical use of *diakonos*. He concludes:

We have now seen that there is in the New Testament a specialized technical use of *diakonein* and *diakonia* to denote the practical service of those who are specially needy ‘in body, or estate,’ and that it is highly probable that the specialized technical use of *diakonos* also has the same reference.⁸

A Consideration of the Similarity in Function

While the purpose of Cranfield’s instruction in the last comment is not to argue for

⁵ A. T. Robertson, “The Acts of the Apostles,” *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 vols. ([Nashville]: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1930; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, n. d.), 3:73.

⁶ *Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon*, abrg. ed., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 162.

⁷ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d ed., trans. by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich; rev. and aug. by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 184.

⁸ C. E. B. Cranfield, “Diakonia in the New Testament,” *Service in Christ: Essays Presented to Karl Barth on His 80th Birthday*, ed. James I. McCord and T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1966), 39.

the origin of the deacon ministry in Acts 6, his conjecture does present a convincing truth that can be directly applied to this argument. That is, the service rendered by these seven men perfectly coincides with the service expected for those who would hold the formal office of deacon. In short, since their primary job was to render *diakonia* (as shown in verses one and two), it is reasonable to assume that they were in essence *diakonoi*. Thus, as the apostles were to do the “ministry (*diakonia*) of the word” in verse four, the seven were to do the ministry (*diakonia*) of ministering (*diakonein*) in verses one and two. Accordingly, it may safely be said that the new “ministry” presented in Acts 6 is functionally equivalent to the later office of deacon.

It appears that as early as 165 A. D. a connection is made between Acts 6 and the official deacon ministry based on similarities in function. As Carl Diemer indicates,

In the early Christian church, the deacons functioned in much the same manner as in the Book of Acts. Justin Martyr (d. 165) tells us they visited the sick, poor, prisoners, widows, and orphans.⁹

These functional similarities also have been observed by modern scholars and theologians.

This interpretation is supported by Lightfoot, for instance, in the following assertion:

The functions moreover are substantially those which devolved on the deacons of the earliest ages, and which still in theory, though not altogether in practice, form the primary duties of the office.¹⁰

In corresponding fashion, Richard N. Longenecker concludes,

the ministry to which the seven were appointed was functionally equivalent to what Paul covered in the title “deacon” (cf. 1 Tim. 3:8-13)--which is but

⁹ Carl J. Diemer, Jr., “Deacons and Other Endangered Species,” *Fundamentalist Journal* 3 (March 1984): 21.

¹⁰ Lightfoot, 188.

to affirm the maxim that in the NT ‘ministry was a function long before it became an office.’¹¹

A. H. Strong, in his *Systematic Theology*, also uses the text of Acts 6:1-6 when writing on the “duties” of deacons as church officers.¹² The cross reference in The New King James Version for the phrase “this business” in Acts 6:3, list the passages of Scripture that deal exclusively with the office of deacon--Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13. This same observation has been made by Alexander Strauch, who rightly contends that although there is a “missing word” there is no “missing concept.”¹³

A Consideration of the Similarity in Qualifications

A related argument is based on the comparison of qualifications as found in Acts 6:1-7 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Though there are differences in these passages (see below), there are also numerous similarities. For instance, the *Believer’s Study Bible* states,

“The seven” are not called deacons in the Bible. It is assumed that they were deacons because they had the same qualifications which Paul stipulated in 1 Tim. 3:8-13.¹⁴

Again, A. H. Strong, comparing Act 6 and 1 Timothy 3, offers the following summary of

¹¹ Richard N. Longenecker, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 12 vols., gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, a division of The Zondervan Corp., 1981), 9:331.

¹² Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology*, three vols. in one, (Old Tappan, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1907), 916-17.

¹³ Alexander Strauch, *The New Testament Deacon: The Church’s Minister of Mercy* (Littleton, Colorado: Lewis & Roth Pub., 1992), 47-48.

¹⁴ *The Believer’s Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1991), 1550, n. 6:1. Cited hereafter as *BSB*.

qualifications for the office of deacon: “The qualifications for the diaconate mentioned in Acts 6:1-4 and 1 Tim. 3:8-13, are, in substance: wisdom, sympathy, and spirituality.”¹⁵

A Consideration of Church History

It is also important to understand the interpretation of this passage in history. The first specific reference to the servants in Acts 6 being “deacons” is found in the writings of Irenaeus,¹⁶ an early church father, in c. A. D. 195.¹⁷ Thus, from the earliest times it appears that churchmen have recognized the foundation of the deacon ministry in Acts 6.

A Consideration of the Historical Accuracy of Luke’s Writing

Despite all this evidence, some have persisted that if Luke had meant to present this narrative as the foundation for the diaconate he would have designated these seven men specifically as “deacons.” This does not necessarily hold true, however. Although, it is equally true that Luke does not say these men are not “deacons,” the silence proves nothing. Additionally, Luke records church history just as it happened, without adding later theological insight. Alexander Strauch notes this truth in the following comment:

Luke records momentous events during the beginning years of Christianity without adding any special comments (Acts 8:5-19; 10:1-48; 13:1-4). He does not match theological solutions or explanations with difficult-to-understand events or practices (Acts 8:14-17; 19:1-7, 12;

¹⁵ Strong, 918.

¹⁶ Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols., eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, n. d.; rear. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1989), 1:434, as cited in Strauch, 44-45. See also, Lightfoot, 188.

¹⁷ *BSB*, 1550, n. 6:1.

21:23-26). Likewise, in Acts 6, Luke records no special name or title for this group of men.¹⁸

Accordingly, F. F. Bruce writing on the book of *Acts*, observes that Luke never calls Paul an “apostle” in the “special sense” that Paul refers to himself in his own letters.¹⁹

However, no one would deny Pauline apostleship.

For Luke to have called the seven “deacons,” he would have had to impose a later church development back into the genesis of this ministry. Notwithstanding, Luke’s methodology lets the record speak for itself—he does not change the historical facts.²⁰ It has been noted by historian Eduard Meyer that Luke’s writings, “in spite of its more restricted content, bears the same character as those of the great historians, of a Polybius, a Livy, and many others.”²¹ David Gooding agrees when he remarks that, “Luke . . . has added the barest minimum of interpretative comment beyond his record of the facts. He has not even invented titles for his sections.”²² Sir William Ramsay makes the observation that,

It is rare to find a narrative so simple and so little forced as that of *Acts*. It is mere uncoloured recital of the important facts in the briefest possible

¹⁸ Strauch, 46-47.

¹⁹ F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, 3d rev. and enl. ed., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1990), 31, 319.

²⁰ Strauch, 45-46.

²¹ Eduard Meyer, *Ursprung und Anfänge des Christentums*, I (Stuttgart/Berlin, 1921), 2f, as cited by Bruce, 27, as cited by Strauch, 46.

²² David Gooding, *True to the Faith, A Fresh Approach to the Acts of the Apostles* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), 426, as quoted in Strauch, 47.

terms The narrator is persuaded that the facts themselves in their barest form are a perfect lesson and a complete instruction, and he feels that it would be an impertinence and even an impiety to intrude his individual views into the narrative.²³

Thus, Strauch, speaking of the well-attested nature of Luke's historical writings, says, "His account speaks for itself."²⁴

A Consideration of Biblical Inspiration

In addressing this argument, it will be helpful to refer to the comments made by Beyer (see above). This is important because in other places even Beyer cannot deny the strong identity of Acts 6 with the diaconate. For instance, he writes, "Ac. 6 may be regarded as indirect evidence concerning the diaconate."²⁵ He only allows this possibility, however, because of his view of the inspiration of Scripture. He is assuming that at the time of writing, Luke may have been influenced by the more formalized diaconate of his day. Thus, he states,

It is possible, however, that ideas gained from the existing diaconate influenced the author when he gave its present form to his rather puzzling source concerning the relationship of the Seven to the Twelve.²⁶

Thus, Beyer admits that he sees the strong similarities between this passage and the diaconate. However, he attempts to explain away the similarities through biblical

²³ William Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1897; rear. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962), 20-21 as cited in Strauch, 47.

²⁴ Strauch, 47

²⁵ Beyer, 90.

²⁶ Ibid.

criticism. That is, he denies the accuracy of the text. His reasoning is that Luke has colored the original situation by his preference and opinion. Therefore, he refuses to attribute any weight to these similarities. However, as argued above, Luke's accuracy to historical facts is beyond question, especially for those who adhere to a verbal-plenary inspiration. As F. F. Bruce acknowledges, "the record of Acts is true to its 'dramatic' date, i.e., to the date of the events and developments which it relates."²⁷

The Argument Based on Purpose

The second major argument against Acts 6 providing the origin of the diaconate concerns the purpose or calling of these men. Some scholars have identified "the seven" as Hellenistic preachers, not deacons. It is supposed that this setting aside was necessary because all the preachers hitherto were Jewish. Consequently, as observed in the examples of Steven and Philip, it is believed that these men functioned as "preachers."

A Consideration of Ethnic Backgrounds

Although Beyer asserts that each of "the seven" were Hellenists, there is no conclusive evidence to substantiate this claim. Some scholars believe that many Hebraic Jews took Hellenistic names because of the culture in which they lived. Consequently, there can be no definite claim made based on the ethnic nature of their names.

A Consideration of "The Seven"

Some commentators have referred to Acts 21:8 to show that the original group

²⁷ Bruce, 18, as quoted in Strauch, 46.

was still called “the seven,” not “deacons,” later in the church’s history.²⁸ Several reasons may be offered, however, for this usage. Firstly, Luke may have used this designation simply to make a specific identification. In other words, he left no room for confusion on the part of his readers about the identity of this man. The Philip mentioned here was to be recognized as the Philip already mentioned in Chapter 6 as one of “the seven.”

Secondly, this is further evidence that Luke did let the record stand “as is,” without making it coincide with the later and more official designations. Had he used “deacon” at this point, it still would have been an imposition of a later church development on the infant church.

Finally, there is little justification for elevating the phrase, “The Seven,” to the place of an official title for “preachers.” Fee (see above) evidently intends to do this when he claims “the Seven” came into prominence alongside “the Twelve.” However, this view carries little support. Of the plethora of New Testament translations available today, it appears that only the New International Version gives this phrase a more official meaning by capitalizing “the Seven.” Most versions simply translate “one of the seven.” The Living Bible supplements the text by saying “one of the first seven deacons.” The New Century Version states “one of the seven helpers.”

²⁸ J. Rawson Lumby, *The Acts of the Apostles*, in *Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges*, gen. ed. J. J. S. Perowne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1887), 152. Lumby remarks, “The appellation is nowhere directly given to the seven. They are still the seven in xxi 8. The deacons of the Pastoral Epistles are a later provision.”; Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, New Testament ed., eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton: Victor Books, a division of SP Publications, 1983), 368.

A Consideration of Their "Preaching"

It should be noted that only two of the seven mentioned were involved in what might be considered preaching functions. This says nothing of the other five men who composed the majority of this group. Whether or not they were ministering in the word is mere guesswork.

Despite the other five, however, it is true that two, Stephen and Philip, were involved in preaching activities. How then are the ministries of these two men to be understood? There are several possibilities. For example, a distinction should be made between the spiritual gifting of an individual and a local church setting an individual aside for an office by the laying on of hands. Steven and Philip, unlike the other five, may have had certain spiritual gifts such as teaching or preaching. However, simply because someone has or practices a particular speaking gift does not mean they have been set aside by the Holy Spirit or the local church to the eldership.

A deacon is set aside in the local church for ministry to people's physical needs, not for pastoring a church. Thus, he is not required to have the gift of "teaching" (1 Timothy 3:8-13). However, holding the office of deacon does not in any way prohibit a deacon from having or using a speaking gift. Thus, a man is not barred from the diaconate just because he is gifted in teaching. There are many "lay teachers" in the modern church who do not profess to be preachers. Many of these individuals are also deacons. Therefore, Steven and Philip could well have been deacons of a local church, yet also have been unwavering in their testimony for the Lord. Actually, the clearest evidence of being Spirit-filled, as all of 'the seven' obviously were, is verbally witnessing about Jesus Christ.

Another issue to be addressed in this argument is that Philip is later called an “evangelist” (Acts 21:8). Again, there is a viable answer. It is not unimaginable that Philip may have been recognized as an elder at this later point in time. If the gifts listed in Ephesians 4:11-12 are considered “elder gifts,” then Philip qualifies (See 2 Timothy 4:5). The Greek in Acts 21:8 may also offer additional evidence for this conjecture. It reads, “Philip the evangelist, being *out (ek)* of the seven . . .” Hence, Philip may now be a “preacher” in the technical sense, having come “out” of the original seven. If this is true, then Luke’s use of the phrase, “the seven,” is simply a way of identifying Philip the preacher as the same man set aside as a deacon in Acts 6. It is not uncommon even today to see a man who is a “deacon” later be set apart as a “preacher” in a particular local body.

An Interpretation of the Evidence

It seems best, based on a thorough consideration of Acts 6, that the narrative be understood as no less than a prototype or paradigm of the official deacon ministry. This has been the interpretation of numerous of scholars. Charles Ryrie states, “The office had its beginnings in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-6),”²⁹ though he does not see the seven as actually holding an office as of yet.³⁰ In similar fashion Chafer states, “In Acts 6 seven men were set aside . . . with prayer and laying on of hands by the apostles (v. 6). It is probable that

²⁹ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976, 1978), 1818, n. 3:8.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1654, n. 6:2. Here he states, “these men were ‘deacons’ only in the sense of being servants” and were not yet “officers” in the church.

these servants were later called deacons.”³¹ E. M. Blaiklock, in the *Tyndale Commentary Series*, entitles the section for Acts 6:1-7 “The deacons.”³² Ralph Earle, in his comments on 1 Timothy in the *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, identifies the men in Acts 6 as the “forerunners” of the office of deacon:

The apostles as overseers of the church in Jerusalem did not have time to take care of the material needs of the poorer members, such as the widow . . . it would seem that these men were the forerunners of the deacons in the church.³³

Likewise, Donald Guthrie is clear in his interpretation when he states,

The earliest allusion to *deacons* is found in Acts vi, where the purpose of their appointment is mainly practical . . . There is no need to suppose that the office of deacon was a late development in view of Phil. i. i.³⁴

Turning to the scholarship and interpretation of Southern Baptists, it is clear that Acts 6 is still often considered the origin of the diaconate. *The New American Commentary* states,

Several traditions and various denominations commonly view the seven men mentioned in Acts 6:5-6 as deacons, but the Scripture uses no specific

³¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, abrg. ed., ed. John F. Walvoord, 2 vols. (Wheaton: Victor Books, a division of SP Publications, 1988), 2:303.

³² E. M. Blaiklock, *The Acts of the Apostles*, in *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1959), 74. He goes on to say (75), however, that, “The Seven are never actually called ‘deacons,’ and may be regarded as special officers appointed to meet a special need.”

³³ Ralph Earle, “1 Timothy,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 12 vols., gen. ed., Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, a division of Zondervan Pub. House, 1978), 11:367.

³⁴ Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, in *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, gen. ed. R. V. G. Tasker, vol. 14 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1957), 83.

term to describe their office. Since the “seven” ministered in a manner similar to deacons, it is perhaps best to regard these men as forerunners in performing a task the deacons later assumed.³⁵

In line with traditional Baptist belief, Howard Foshee writes in his *Broadman Church Manual*,

The prototype of today’s deacon is found in the Acts 6 account of seven men being appointed by the Jerusalem church to resolve a fellowship problem. The word ‘deacon’ does not appear in this scriptural account. Baptists generally agree, however, that these seven men represent the beginning of a deacon ministry.³⁶

Robert Naylor, in his book *The Baptist Deacon*, further illustrates commonly held Baptist beliefs when he expounds,

These seven men are not called deacons in the book of Acts. They are most often referred to as ‘the seven.’ It is a matter of general agreement, however, that the election of these seven qualified men is the real beginning of the deacon as a church officer.³⁷

Therefore, based on biblical, lexical, functional, historical, and traditional arguments, and in agreement with a majority of scholarly interpreters, it is proper to see Acts 6:1-7 as the inception of the deacon ministry. It may be that the occasion of Acts 6 does not present the more formalized office of deacon as found in later church history (1 Timothy 3:8, 13; Philippians 1:1), but it seems quite definite that the account does present the diaconate’s more informal origin. However, this should not be surprising, seeing that

³⁵ Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr., *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, in *The New American Commentary*, vol. 34, gen. ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 115.

³⁶ Howard B. Foshee, *Broadman Church Manual* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1973), 101.

³⁷ Robert E. Naylor, *The Baptist Deacon* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1955), 7.

many scholars recognize that all positions in the early church were more informal and spontaneous than what is found in the end of the New Testament era.³⁸ In conclusion, it may be safely assumed with a high degree of probability and confidence, that Baptists have a valid argument for using Acts 6:1-7 as a basis for the diaconate.

Important Implications for the Study of the Diaconate

Recognizing the origin of the diaconate in Acts 6 has several important implications for the study of this ministry. It provides the historical roots for the diaconate, giving a clear and consistent picture of the church offices as they evolved from the earliest times, and it provides important insights concerning the qualifications and function of the deacon.

Implications Concerning Church Polity

For one to deny that Acts 6 is the origin of the deacon ministry is to deny that the deacon ministry has a recorded history at all. However, since the other major events in the life of the early church were chronicled, it would prove amazing that the inception of this significant ministry be deleted. It would be assumed that such an important office would have a record of its foundations preserved in history.³⁹ As Bruce says, *Acts* is the second

³⁸ Lothar Coenen, "Bishop," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, gen. ed. Colin Brown, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1975), 1:198. Coenen states, "In any case, by the time of the Pastoral Epistles the charismatic structure of the earlier Pauline church, whose functions are described grammatically by the use of participles, has given way to an organized system of offices for which substantives are used."

³⁹ William Owen Carver, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1916), 66. Carver states, "Silence leaves us free but the original example may fitly be followed."

volume of Luke's *History of Christian Origins*.⁴⁰ In similar fashion, Lightfoot has noted,

Again, it seems clear from the emphasis with which St. Luke dwells on the new institution, that he looks on the establishment of this office, not as an isolated incident, but as the initiation of a new order of things in the Church.⁴¹

At any rate, if the origin is not seen here, then today's church is merely left to guess work concerning the development of early church polity.

Further, if Acts 6 does not speak of "deacons" then another perplexity exists. That is, a major organizational change takes place in the Jerusalem church resulting in an important new ministry. However, this important new ministry is never again mentioned; it just fades away into nothingness. If this peculiarity exists, then one must ask the question--"Why mention such a major change, if it is never to be heard of again?"

This is an especially pertinent question in light of the type of ministry these men were to perform in caring for the poor. This concern was certainly not deleted from the life of the church. Or was it? The practice of community sharing within the church, mentioned three times in the first five chapters (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37; 5:1-2), is never mentioned again after Acts 6:1-6. Thus, an explanation has to be given for not only the new ministry but for the lack of community giving. The obvious answer to this situation is one that preserves both this new ministry and the church's care for the poor. That is, "the seven," having been set aside for this specific task, continued performing ministry to the

It is quite possible that it was the departure in setting up a new office that occasioned the laying on of hands."

⁴⁰ Bruce, 15, as noted in Strauch, 49.

⁴¹ Lightfoot, 188.

poor in a more organized and official way, thus preventing the need for communal sharing. This assumption is both contextually and logically sound.

Further, it is much easier to understand the situation if it is recognized that Paul probably construed his later model for church organization, including the idea of deacon ministry, from the infant church at Jerusalem. According to F. J. A. Hort,

The Seven at Jerusalem would of course be well known to St. Paul and to many others outside Palestine, and it would not be strange if the idea propagated itself. Indeed analogous wants might well lead to analogous institutions.⁴²

Hort's conjecture is in harmony with Paul's continued concern with the poor (Acts 24:17; Galatians 2:10), his concern that churches be organized (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5-9), and his concern that the various churches be somewhat consistent in their practices (1 Corinthians 4:17, 11:16).⁴³

Implications Concerning the Qualifications and Function of the Deacon

A second contribution made to the study of the diaconate from the Acts narrative has to do with deacon qualifications. This passage, apart from 1 Timothy 3:8-13, provides the only information available on the qualifications of a deacon. This becomes even more significant when the relationship between Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3 is considered. Even though they are similar in many respects, the Acts passage does offer several unique contributions.

⁴² F. J. A. Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1914), 209, as quoted in Strauch, 52.

⁴³ Strauch, 53.

For instance, Acts 6 paints a picture of what the early church did by way of example. 1 Timothy is didactic in nature, providing Paul's specific teachings and instructions concerning the deacon ministry. Another important difference is one of emphasis. Though each passage contains both spiritual and moral qualifications, Acts 6 more clearly exemplifies the spiritual concerns while 1 Timothy focuses on the moral concerns. The importance of this distinction has been observed by Dr. Carl Diemer, Jr. He has pointed out that Acts 6:1-7 should probably be used in selecting deacons while 1 Timothy 3:8-13 should be used to direct the deacon's lifestyle.⁴⁴ Concerning the 1 Timothy passage, he comments,

There are men in the local church who meet the requirements of this passage of Scripture (i.e., not hypocrites, drunkards, or divorced, etc.) but who are still unqualified to be deacons. This passage is designed to direct the deacons in their lifestyle rather than the church in its selection of qualified men.⁴⁵

Dr. Diemer's distinction is certainly proper and carries vital insight for the local church. According to Acts 6, if a man is not full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, then he should not serve. Likewise, if he is not active in ministry he should not be appointed. If a man has already been set aside and has ceased doing ministry, he should step down. The office of deacon is given by God for ministry. Thus, the position of deacon is not an office to hold, but a ministry to perform.

⁴⁴ Diemer, 21.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

APPENDIX B

ARE LAYMEN TO SERVE AS ELDERS?

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*Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.
1 Timothy 5:17*

Introduction

There has been general disagreement among Protestant churches concerning who is qualified to serve as an elder. Presbyterians, for instance, believe that “laymen” are to serve as elders and usually embrace an “elder rule” form of church government.¹ Others believe that deacons (who are also laymen) are in fact elders. The position of this paper, however, is that neither of these interpretations is correct. Rather, the only persons qualified to serve as elders (or “bishops” or “pastors”) are those who have been called by God as preachers. Accordingly, each of these preachers will have been equipped by God with at least one of the spiritual gifts listed in Ephesian 4:11. The following discussion will therefore focus on who is qualified to fill the New Testament office of elder.

¹ The term “laymen” is used in this paper to describe members of the body of Christ who have not been called to preach (Matthew 4:17, 23; Mark 16:14-15; 1 Timothy 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:11; 2 Peter 2:5). “Layelders” is used to indicate laymen who are set apart to the office of elder (or pastor, or bishop). The designation “elder rule” is used in this context to describe that system of church government wherein a plurality of “layelders” are required in each local church and are entrusted with the oversight of that congregation.

Who Is Qualified to Serve as an Elder?

Those who believe laypersons should serve as elders will generally offer the following evidences to substantiate their position. Firstly, they relate the function of this office to the function of elders in the Jewish synagogue. Secondly, they point out that elders are always spoken of in the plural when mentioned in the New Testament. And, thirdly, they interpret 1 Timothy 5:17 in a way that differentiates kinds of elders in the church. Thus, each of these three arguments will be addressed.

The Office of Elder and Its Relation to the Jewish Synagogue

As stated in Chapter 2, there is ample evidence to show that the term elder was used as a primary designation for various leaders in Judaism. However, does the use of this term in relation to the church necessarily indicate that the church adopted the entire system of elder rule from the synagogue? It is the writer's opinion that it does not. To substantiate this claim, the following observations are given:

Distinctions Between the Synagogue and the Church

Primarily, there was a qualitative distinction between the synagogue and the church; by their very natures, they were different. The synagogue of Judaism was modeled according to culture, tradition, and common sense; the church was birthed by God, led by Christ, and filled with the Spirit. Accordingly, the former was a carnal organization while the latter was a spiritual, dynamic, living organism.

However, because of the initial closeness of these two organizations, each having the same ethnic, cultural, and geographical orientation, there were naturally certain

customs and characteristics passed from Judaism to the church. What was adopted by the church, however, was both limited and temporary. The association was limited because the church did not become a carbon copy of the synagogue. As Chafer admits:

The suggestion that the local church was organized after the model of the synagogue is not supported in Scripture . . . Only as the church matured were structures established.²

The association was temporary because the church was finally severed from official Judaism and the synagogue through persecution by the Jewish leaders.

Accordingly, as the church expanded, it began to adopt Hellenistic features. For example, the term elder was used almost exclusively early on to designate church leadership. However, the term bishop was later adopted from the Greco-Roman world and incorporated into ecclesiastical vocabulary. Paul even seems to favor the latter term toward the end of his ministry (1 Timothy 3:1). Although similarities existed, then, there was still a unique and primitive independence of the early church.

This independence is further noticed in other distinctions. For instance, all believers are considered to be priests and kings under the New Covenant. Similarly, the function of the New Testament prophet was not equivalent to that of the Old Testament prophet; now the apostle was the revealer of divine truth. Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes were not found at all in the church. The deacon was a brand new office altogether,³ as was the calling of the evangelist.

² Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, ed. John F. Walvoord, abrdg. ed., 2 vols. (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, a division of Scripture Press, 1988), 2:303.

³ Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (Lynn, Mass.: Hendrickson Pub., Inc., 1981), 189-90, states of the diaconate that there is “. . . no hint

Furthermore, the Jewish terms that remained in the church were not exclusively associated with the synagogue. For example, shepherd, teacher, and elder were commonly used in various Gentile cultures to designate leaders. Even in the Old Testament, these three terms were used of both secular and religious leaders. Therefore, it is possible that these terms were utilized by the church because of their popularity, both within and without Judaism.

Nevertheless, even if the term elder is considered to be uniquely associated with the synagogue, there are no grounds for supposing that the whole system of elder rule was adopted by the church. The elder system found in Judaism was based on practical not spiritual foundations. Their lay elders were often chosen because of personal wealth, influence, or both. The term elder was thus used to distinguish “important families” who served as “lay members of the Sanhedrin” from the scribes and priests (Mark 11:27).⁴ The church on the other hand obtained its leaders, not by human means, but by the will of God (Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1).

There is no more reason then to believe that the early church adopted elder rule along with their use of the Jewish term elder than there is reason to believe that they set up

that it was either a continuation of the order of Levites or an adaptation of an office in the synagogue. The philanthropic purpose for which it was established presents no direct point of contact with the known duties of either . . . It is therefore a baseless, though a very common, assumption that the Christian diaconate was copied from the arrangements of the synagogue.”

⁴ *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, Currently available only in electronic form (Copyright by Timothy and Barbara Friberg, 1994), s. v. “πρεσβύτερος.” Cited hereafter as *ANLEX*. *ANLEX* material is taken from *BibleWorks for Windows*, version 3.0 (Big Fork, MT.: Hermeneutika; Copyright by Michael S. Bushell, 1992-1995).

the church as a secular business based on their use of the Greek term bishop. These terms were merely terms of designation; they were borrowed from the surrounding cultures to provide a ready identification by the people. As the Jews were accustomed to being ruled by elders, so now “elders” were to be their primary leaders in the church. As Greeks could quickly recognize an overseer as being a leader, so now there would be an “overseer” in the church. Since God had made His body one in Christ (Ephesians 2:14-18), the church now had a mixture of people. Accordingly, terminology and customs were adopted from the various cultures to easily accommodate all persons involved. This adoption of terminology, however, did not mean that the respective systems were also adopted--the function and organization of the church was new, spiritual, and freshly given by God. Thus, as H. J. Carpenter has said:

probably we should assume that the Church, under the guidance of the Apostles, created the subdivisions of its ministry in forms adapted for its mission to the world. It transformed whatever it took from other sources, and gave to words like *episkopos* and *diakonos*, which had no technical religious meaning in ordinary Gk., a new significance related to its own work as the Church of Jesus Christ.⁵

The Spiritual Nature of Elders in the Church

Elders in the New Testament church were distinctly different from the elders of the synagogue. Christian elders, being called by God, were indwelt and gifted by the Spirit of God. Though every believer was indwelt and gifted by God, it appears that a specific list of gifts were given in Ephesians 4:11 for elders. Consequently, every man called to preach

⁵ H. J. Carpenter, “Minister, Ministry,” in *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, ed. by Alan Richardson (New York: Collier Books, Macmillan Pub. Co., 1950), 150.

by God was endowed with one of these “office” gifts. H. Orton Wiley makes a specific connection between these gifts and being called to the ministry when he states,

St. Paul enumerates the following classes in the New Testament ministry . . . ‘And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers’ . . . The five offices mentioned by St. Paul, may be arranged in two main divisions, (1) The Extraordinary and Transitional Ministry, and (2) The Regular and Permanent Ministry.⁶

In similar fashion, Millard Erickson has said, “Ephesians 4:11 is really a listing of various offices in the church, or of persons who are God’s gifts to the church as it were.”⁷

Thus, when one considers the gifts listed in Ephesians 4:11, it is apparent that these were for the benefit of building up the church. Consequently, it may safely be assumed that these gifts were the ones given by the Holy Spirit to those whom He called as elders. This identification is evident at least when Paul makes reference to his own calling and gifts in 1 Timothy 2:7--preacher, apostle, and teacher. Further, the following survey should provide evidence that these gifts are used in the New Testament in relation to the office of elder.

One of the spiritual gifts listed in Ephesians 4:11 is *pastor-teacher*. It has already been recognized in Chapter 2 that the elders were to be bishops and “shepherd” or “pastor” the flock of God (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-3). Further, since pastor-teacher is considered to be one office, specific references to teachers should be seen as being interchangeable with pastor (1 Timothy 2:11-12; James 3:1). This may well have been the

⁶ H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 3 vol. (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1943), 3:129.

⁷ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, one vol. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983, 1984, 1985), 875.

gifting of the elder James, the half-brother of the Lord and writer of the epistle, who was a primary leader in the first church at Jerusalem (Matthew 13:55; Acts 15:13, 21:18; Galatians 1:19, 2:9, 12; James 1:1).

The *apostles* were also elders. When corresponding with the Asian churches of the Dispersion, Peter recognizes his calling as an apostle (1 Peter 1:1) and then states that he is also an elder (1 Peter 5:1). The Apostle John identifies himself as an elder in the salutations of his second and third epistles (2 John 1; 3 John 1). The office of elder is also closely related to the gift of apostle in the book of Acts. In Acts 4:35-37, offerings in the church of Jerusalem were brought and laid at the apostles feet, an act indicating their responsibilities of overseeing the finances. In Acts 11:29-30, an offering sent to the church at Jerusalem was given to the elders. Hence, the parallel use seemingly identifies the apostle and elder as being one and the same. A close connection is kept with these two terms throughout Acts where they are often grouped together (15:2, 4, 6, 22; 16:4; etc.).

The other two gifts of Ephesians 4:11, *prophet* and *evangelist*, are apparently connected to the office of elder as well. In Acts 11:19-24, Barnabas is sent by the Jerusalem church to the church at Antioch when a number of people were saved. Evidently, Barnabas became their pastor-teacher. Hence, Cowen writes, "Barnabas was a pastor of the church at Antioch . . ." ⁸ If so, he was definitely an elder. Further support for his being an elder is given in Acts 14:23 where he is acknowledged along with Paul as

⁸ Gerald Cowen, "The Bishop," in his *Sermon Starters from the Greek New Testament*, foreword by W. A. Criswell (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1985), 79.

appointing other elders in the church. The appointment of elders was always performed by fellow elders (1 Timothy 4:14). Similarly, in Acts 15:2 and 22, his meeting with the corporate group of elders indicates that he was at least on the same functional level as they were. Later, however, Barnabas was also named among the prophets (Acts 13:1), indicating that he was both a pastor and a prophet. The primary leadership offered by the prophets and teachers of Acts 13:1 further implies they were functioning as elders in the church of Antioch.

As for the gift of evangelist, it is mentioned only two other times apart from Ephesians 4:11. It is used once of Philip who was one of the seven chosen as a deacon in the Jerusalem church in Acts 6. In Acts 21:8, however, he is noted as an “evangelist” living in Caesarea. After becoming a deacon, he no doubt was called by God to be a preacher of the Gospel. The other reference is to Timothy (2 Timothy 4:5), who was evidently an elder and a pastor at the church in Ephesus (1 Timothy 4:14, 5:22). This verse, then, seems to connect the gift of evangelism with the office of elder.

If these assumptions are viable, a complete identification is made between each gift listed in Ephesians 4:11 and the office of elder. Accordingly, the spiritual nature of the office of elder has been established and a distinction has been made between the elder of the church and the elder rule system of the synagogue. An elder in the church is an elder because of the calling, gifting, and filling of the Holy Spirit--not merely because he is a good person in the church. The New Testament elder is supernaturally chosen and endowed to fulfill his function as an overseer in the church. Hence, any church that places someone in the office of elder who has not been called to preach as a pastor-teacher is

doing that individual a great disservice. They are asking him to do something that he has not been chosen or gifted by God to do.

A Plurality of Elders

The Purpose of a Plurality of Elders

The term elder, when used in the New Testament with reference to a church office, is always found in the plural. However, is it to be deduced from this common usage that a plurality of elders is required for each local church? Again, the writer does not think so.

Some have argued that each local church is to have a multiplicity of elders.⁹ The reasoning is usually attributed to the references to a plural number of elders in many of the churches in the New Testament (i.e., Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5). Several arguments, nevertheless, may be presented against this line of reasoning.

For example, it is important to note that denominations were not a part of the early church. Thus, every city (even the large ones) was considered to have a solitary church. Therefore, a plurality of elders was undoubtedly needed because of the numerous believers in these congregations. This fact has led Strong to assert that,

There is . . . no evidence that the number of elders was uniform, or that the plurality which frequently existed was due to any other cause than the size of the churches for which these elders cared.¹⁰

Thus, it is not only possible, but even highly probable, that when eldership is

⁹ Alexander Strauch, *The New Testament Deacon: The Church's Minister of Mercy* (Littleton, Colorado: Lewis & Roth Pub., 1992), 168-69, n. 6.

¹⁰ Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology*, three vols. in one, (Old Tappan, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1907), 915-16.

spoken of in the plural a reference is being made to the leadership of multiple house churches in a given city (Acts 2:46; Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:15, 19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 2). The believers of the first century had no large and elaborate buildings in which to house thousands of people; the early Christians had few corporate possessions due to losses they suffered during the intense periods of persecution. Thus, what Ryrie has noted about the issue of a plurality of elders is pertinent:

. . . whether this meant several elders in each house church or possibly one elder in each individual congregation (and thus a plurality in each city) is debatable.¹¹

Hence, he recognizes the prominent role of the house church in the New Testament.

When rightly understood, this factor bears significant influence on a proper interpretation of biblical ecclesiology.

There is also a practical reason why a plurality of elders could not always be established in each local church--availability. Strong says,

It would, moreover, seem antecedently improbable that every church of Christ, however small, should be required to have a plural eldership, particularly since churches exist that have only a single male member.¹²

Thus, it is fallacious reasoning to read into the New Testament a precedent that would require a plurality of elders in every local church.

Finally, and maybe most importantly, even if a plurality of elders were to be required in every congregation, this still would not justify the setting aside of "lay" elders.

¹¹ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 143. Cited Hereafter as *ASBD*.

¹² Strong, 916.

When references to the office of elder are made in Scripture, this position is never said to be filled by one of the “saints” (cf. Philippians 1:1). Conversely, every elder who is specifically identified in the New Testament is identified as a preacher (i.e., 1 Peter 5:1; 2 John 1; 3 John 1; 2 Timothy 1:11).

This is not to say, however, that a plurality of elders is always wrong. It is perfectly acceptable today, as it was in the New Testament, for larger churches to have assistant or associate pastors. It is agreed, however, “only in such cases can we say that New Testament example favors it.”¹³ Thus, Strong appears to be correct when he says, “The N.T. example, while it permits the multiplication of assistant pastors according to need, does not require a plural eldership in every case . . .”¹⁴

The Biblical Precedent of Having One Primary Leader

Those desiring to have a board of lay-elders often argue that there is no precedent for having one pastor who is *the* elder in the church. However, the passages concerning James and the Seven Churches do provide that evidence. Further, the same leadership model is presented in the Old Testament as well; Moses, Joshua, David, and others are each recognized as the primary leader of God’s people during their respective times. This does not exclude the possibility of other leadership—that is a necessity. However, neither does having added leadership negate the principle of having a primary leader.

For instance, Moses had other leaders set aside to help him including elders

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

(Exodus 18:12), judges (Exodus 18:13-26; Deuteronomy 1:9-18), and the seventy elders (Numbers 11:14-30). Immediately following the appointment of the judges, nevertheless, Moses was still in charge as God's primary leader--Moses, not the layleaders (the people or the judges), was called by God to the Mount for instructions (Exodus 19:3; Deuteronomy 5:23-31). Further, it was Moses, not a layman or lay-elder, who presented this organizational structure to the people (Deuteronomy 1:9) and who was to teach the people the law of God (Exodus 18:19-20). He was responsible for the final selection and appointment of these leaders (Exodus 18:21, 25; Deuteronomy 1:13-15); for administering these leaders (Deuteronomy 1:16-18); and for serving as the final and highest authority (Exodus 18:22, 26). Though Moses received wise counsel and help from both his priestly father-in-law Jethro and the people (Exodus 18:14-24; Deuteronomy 1:13-14), he nonetheless was the administrator of the group. Likewise, the elders participated in many areas of Israel's religious and civil life (Exodus 18:12; Leviticus 4:15; Deuteronomy 19:12, 18; 21:1-6), but Moses was still the shepherd of Israel (Psalm 77:20; Isaiah 63:11-12).

The same was true after the appointment of the Seventy Elders--it was Moses, not the laymen, who was still in charge (Numbers 12:1; 13:1). This is evident by the Lord's rebuke and judgment of all those who rebelled against Moses--Aaron and Miriam (who no doubt had a higher rank than the seventy--Numbers 12); the ten rebellious spies and the people (Numbers 14); and Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and the others who followed them (Numbers 16). In the latter instance, the elders supported Moses, but he was still the leader (Numbers 16:25). Likewise, these seventy went with Moses, Joshua, Aaron,

Nadab, and Abihu to the mount of God (Exodus 24:1, 13), but it was Moses and another associate preacher Joshua who went to meet God (24:2, 13). And again, the seventy were told by Moses that Aaron and Hur were to be in charge while they were gone (Exodus 24:14). In conclusion, the only instances where the “people” or “layleaders” took charge were during times of rebellion with the end result being God’s judgment.

In the case of David, he had many chosen prophets, counselors, leaders, military commanders, and fighting men, but he was still *the* shepherd of Israel (1 Chronicles 11:1-12:40). His unique position is especially noticed in the admonition given by his military leaders in his old age; they said, *“But Abishai the son of Zeruiah came to his aid, and struck the Philistine and killed him. Then the men of David swore to him, saying, ‘You shall go out no more with us to battle, lest you quench the lamp of Israel.’”* (2 Samuel 21:17). Thus, David is recognized as the vision setter of Israel; it was to David that God imparted His desired direction for Israel.

In similar examples, one finds the same principle being exercised in the economy of God. God chooses primary leaders for the purpose of revealing His vision and will--Noah was “divinely warned” to build the ark (Hebrews 11:7; see Genesis 6:14); Abraham was called as the father of a new nation (Genesis 12:1-5); Joseph “had a dream” (Genesis 37:5); Gideon was confronted by “the Angel of the Lord” (Judges 6:11-16); Samuel had a revelation (1 Samuel 3:1-4; 3:19-4:1); Solomon was given wisdom (1 Kings 3:5-14); and Nehemiah did all that “God had put in [his] heart to do for Jerusalem” (Nehemiah 2:12). In each of these cases in the Old Testament, God always had a primary individual who served as the leader and the person of vision among His people.

This same principle is carried over in the New Testament where it is suggested by a number of passages that there was one primary elder or pastor in a given church. In Paul's most definitive statement on the church offices in 1 Timothy 3:1-13, the bishop is spoken of in the singular while the deacons are spoken of in the plural. Likewise, James appears to have had a singularly important position at Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Galatians 1:19; 2:12). These passages, according to Strong, are indicators that "James was the pastor or president of the church at Jerusalem, an intimation which tradition corroborates."¹⁵ Further, the churches of Revelation 2 and 3 are said to have one "angel" (Revelation 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). The word "angel" means "messenger" and is probably a reference to the pastor. It is likely that this term was adopted from the synagogue, where the elder in charge of prayers was referred to as "the angel of the congregation."¹⁶ If this symbolism is correct, "it is clear that each church had, not many pastors, but one."¹⁷ Accordingly, then, Ryrie has said, "Under the congregational system, the pastor is usually considered to be the single elder in the church."¹⁸

In both the Old and New Testaments, therefore, God still uses a primary leader to share His vision with His people. In today's language, that fact means God will use the pastor of a local church to be the primary vision setter for the congregation. In the words of George Barna,

¹⁵ Strong, 916.

¹⁶ Wiley, 133.

¹⁷ Strong, 916.

¹⁸ Ryrie, *ASBD*, 147.

Pastors who actively seek to fulfill God's vision for their ministry are a treasure for the church They are pastors who have blended their vision for personal ministry with the vision imparted by God for the churches they lead. Their churches will accomplish something unique, meaningful and special because the Holy Spirit has enabled them to capture an image of the future and to chart a course of action to reach that goal.¹⁹

Those who favor having a board of lay-elders in the church often sneer at the idea of having "a" pastor for the church. However, this has always been God's model in history. It may be they fear such a privileged place of leadership will breed contempt, pride, and foul play. Admittedly, this is always a possibility. However, God has always required that such a leader be one who is fully surrendered to Him; otherwise, God will remove him.²⁰ Accordingly, Barna has also noted the need for such a leader to exemplify godly character from a pure heart. He states,

Visionary pastors are leaders who have surrendered the sense of personal ambition that drives so many pastors. Instead, the natural tendency for self-promotion has been replaced by an urgent need to seek God's glory by doing His work, His way, according to His vision.²¹

Interpretations of 1 Timothy 5:17

Apart from the arguments of history and plurality, those supporting the doctrine of "lay-elders" often turn to 1 Timothy 5:17. From this scripture, they claim the office of elder is divided into two groups--those who teach and those who rule. Somehow, and with little justification, they further take this verse to mean that a division is being made

¹⁹ George Barna, *The Power of Vision: How You Can Capture and Apply God's Vision for Your Ministry* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, a Division of Gospel Light, 1992), 32.

²⁰ See the examples given in Chapter 6, pages 192 and 193.

²¹ Barna, 33.

between preachers and laymen. John Calvin was the first person to interpret this verse in a way that distinguished between “ministers proper” and “lay (or ruling) elders.”²²

Accordingly, he was the first person in church history to set aside laymen as elders.²³

The advocates of this view claim they hold to a two-office polity (elders or bishops and deacons), but recognize three functions within the two offices (teaching, ruling, serving).²⁴ The elders are divided into two groups based on the functions of ruling and teaching, though all elders are to teach. Some elders, however, may be given the gift of teaching in a “heightened way.” This unique ability is given as “a special gift to some but not all of the elders.”²⁵ These especially gifted elders are generally recognized as the senior pastors. They understand this view to be expressed in Ephesians 4:11 by the phrase “some pastors and teachers,” believing that all elders are pastors and undershepherds, but

²² Lightfoot (195, n. 3) states the following: “The distinction of lay or ruling elders, and ministers proper or teaching elders, was laid down by Calvin and has been adopted as the constitution of several presbyterian Churches. This interpretation of St Paul’s language is refuted by Rothe . . . Ritschl . . . and Schaff . . . , besides older writers such as Vitranga and Mosheim.”

²³ Strong (915) cites Henry M. Dexter, *Congregationalism* (n. p.), 52, who states: “Calvin was a natural aristocrat, not a man of the people like Luther. Taken out of his own family to be educated in a family of the nobility, he received an early bent toward exclusiveness. He believed in authority and loved to exercise it. He could easily have been a despot. He assumed all citizens to be Christians until proof to the contrary. He resolved church discipline into police control. He confessed that the eldership was an expedient to which he was driven by circumstances, though after creating it he naturally enough endeavored to procure Scriptural proof in its favor.”

²⁴ George W. Knight, III, “Two Offices (Elders/Bishops and Deacons) and Two Orders of Elders (Preaching/Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders): A New Testament Study,” *Presbuterion: A Journal of the Eldership* 11 (Spring 1985): 2.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

that only some elders are designated as primary teachers.²⁶ The contradictions of this position are evident, as indicated by this brief overview.

Many, however, have recognized that this division of the eldership introduces a false dichotomy. Even C. T. Wilson, a Presbyterian minister, resisted having “ruling elders” in his congregation, because he believed that 1 Timothy 5:17 “expresses a diversity in the exercise of the Presbyterial office, but not in the office itself.”²⁷ He is in agreement with Strong, then, who states,

this text only shows that the one office of presbyter or bishop involved two kinds of labor, and that certain presbyters or bishops were more successful in one kind than in the other. That gifts of teaching and ruling belonged to the same individual, is clear from Acts 20:28-31; Ephesians 4:11; Hebrews 13:7; 1 Timothy 3:2.²⁸

At any rate, if lay elders are to be seen in 1 Timothy 5:17-19, then they surely should be paid as the whole context indicates.

This doctrine also lends itself to other strange interpretations of Scripture. For instance, several passages that unquestionably are meant to be a unit would have to be subdivided. As an example, 1 Timothy 3:2-4 would be a reference to the ministry of teaching elders while 3:5ff would be a reference to ministry of the ruling.²⁹ However, the 1 Timothy passage is not addressing two groups of bishops but “a” bishop. Furthermore,

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ C. T. Wilson, *Primitive Government of Christian Churches* (n.p.), as cited in Strong, 915.

²⁸ Strong, 915.

²⁹ Ibid.

if a division is made between teaching (3:2) and ruling (3:5), then how can all said to be teachers in Ephesians 4:11.³⁰ Additionally, with such an interpretation, the qualifications regarding those who teach should not apply to those who rule and vice versa.

Thus, it seems correct to agree with Lightfoot who says:

Nevertheless there is no ground for supposing that the work of teaching and the work of governing pertained to separate members of the presbyterial college. As each had his special gift, so would he devote himself more or less exclusively to the one or the other of these sacred functions.³¹

A Summary of Lay-Elders

In summary, there are three reasons why lay persons should not be ordained as elders. Firstly, it is likely that the gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4:11-12 were gifts given by the Holy Spirit to those whom He called to be elders. Thus, to set aside a man who has not been uniquely endowed and equipped by God to be a preacher is qualitatively wrong. It is unfair to ask a man to fill this position when he has not been called by God to do so.

Secondly, the plural use of elder in the New Testament is best interpreted as being a reference to large city churches where a multiplicity of pastors were needed. Considering the use of multiple houses for meeting places, it is not hard to believe that a pastor would be needed for each geographical territory of a metropolitan church.

Thirdly, the only verse that would even possibly allow this interpretation is 1 Timothy 5:17. However, scholars have successfully shown the fallacy of trying to form a

³⁰ Ibid. Knight's system is so confusing that it would have to be seen as less than biblical. This is evident by the length of his title for the journal article.

³¹ Lightfoot, 195.

dichotomy of function based on this verse. If it is used to justify the idea of lay elders, then it is also true that these men should be paid salaries, attend seminary, and serve as staff pastors. Any person who is a “pastor” would surely be able to pastor a church if necessary. If there is no distinction in calling between the layman and the preacher, then the church should stop recognizing those called to “the ministry.”

APPENDIX C

THE CHRISTIAN'S USE OF WINE

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THE CHRISTIAN'S USE OF WINE

Likewise deacons must be reverent, . . . not given to much wine . . .
1 Timothy 3:8

Introduction

The word *oinos*, as used in 1 Timothy 3:3, 8, is the most commonly used word in the New Testament to denote “wine.” It generally describes fermented grape juice.¹ It is helpful to understand that in the Middle East, especially in ancient times, wine was a common household beverage. Wine itself was required because of the poor quality of their drinking water. This practice did not lead to widespread alcoholism, however, probably because the customary procedure was to mix about three parts water to one part wine.² Likewise, the phrase “not given” is not a demand for abstinence. The word “given” (*prosecho*) is one that prohibits “addiction.”³ It is a present active participle that

¹ Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 3d. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1957, 1961, 1966; Paperback ed., 1983), 1167-69.

² Gerald Cowen, “New Testament Wine,” in his *Sermon Starters from the Greek New Testament*, foreword by W. A. Criswell (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1985), 75-77.

³ J. H. Bernard, *The Pastoral Epistles*, in *The Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges*, [gen. ed. J. J. S. Perowne] (Cambridge: University Press, 1899; repr. 1906), 57.

denotes a continuous, habitual practice.

Considering this, it is often asked why the deacons were not called upon to abstain from the use of wine. Homer Kent, Jr. gives an insightful comment at this point:

It is extremely difficult for the twentieth-century American to understand and appreciate the society of Paul's day. The fact that deacons were not told to become total abstainers, but rather to be temperate, does not mean that Christians today can use liquor in moderate amounts. The wine employed for the common beverage was very largely water. The social stigma and the tremendous social evils that accompany drinking today did not attach themselves to the use of wine as the common beverage in the homes of Paul's day. Nevertheless, as the church grew and the Christian consciousness and conscience developed, the dangers of drinking came to be more clearly seen. The principle laid down elsewhere by Paul that Christians should not do anything to cause a brother to stumble came to be applied to the use of wine

. . . Certainly in present-day America, the use of wine by a Christian would abet a recognized social evil, and would set a most dangerous example for the young and the weak. To us, Paul would undoubtedly say, 'No wine at all.'⁴

Thus, in answering the question of whether a deacon (1 Timothy 3:8), a pastor (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7), or other Christian (Titus 2:3) should drink wine, at least three things should be considered. These are: (1) the admonitions concerning the negative effects of alcohol, (2) the admonitions for doing things that edify, and (3) the admonitions for wisely spending our time.

Admonitions Concerning the Negative Effects of Alcohol

The Bible offers numerous warnings concerning the negative effects of alcohol (and other stimulants). The continued use of alcohol facilitates backsliding and

⁴ Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Pastoral Epistles* (Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH Books, 1982), 133, as cited by John MacArthur, Jr., *1 Timothy*, in *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 127-28.

disobedience (Isaiah 5:11-13; 28:7; Hosea 4:11). Consuming alcohol can be the practice of fools (Proverbs 20:1) and the source of needless woes, pains, and sorrows (23:29-35). Poverty will come to those who mix with drunkards and gluttons (Proverbs 23:19-21). The first two times it is mentioned in Scripture, it is associated with immorality (Genesis 9:21; 19:32). Wine often leads to injustice in law (Isaiah 5:20-23) and business (Habakkuk 2:15).

There are also consequences for both the believer and unbeliever concerning their relationship with the church and with God. The believer who participates in this lifestyle may require church discipline (1 Corinthians 5:11-13). For the unbeliever, Scripture plainly asserts that a drunkard shall not enter the kingdom of heaven (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21).⁵

Admonitions Concerning the Need for Edification

The Believer's Personal Edification

In Scripture, the believer's fellowship with Jesus in the Spirit is often set in contrast to his being intoxicated with wine. At Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy

⁵ Commenting on the "works of the flesh" in Galatians 5:19-21, James M. Boice makes the following note: "Paul adds a solemn warning, saying that those who habitually practice such things will never inherit God's kingdom. This does not mean that if a Christian falls into sin through getting drunk, or some such thing, he thereby loses his salvation. The tense of the verb (present) indicates a habitual continuation in fleshly sins rather than an isolated lapse, and the point is that those who continually practice such sins give evidence of having never received God's Spirit." (James Montgomery Boice, "Galatians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, 12 vols. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1976], 10:497.)

Spirit caused the disciples to preach the gospel, not waste time in a bar becoming inebriated (Acts 2:15). At the Lord's Supper in the Corinthian church, many chose to become drunken and incur God's judgment rather than experience the blessing of communion with Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:20-32). Likewise, Paul insists that to be controlled by the Spirit's filling is superior to being controlled by wine (Ephesians 5:18). The Spirit leads one to praise, worship, love, thanksgiving, and submission (Ephesians 5:19-21) while wine leads one to dissipation or debauchery, as exemplified by the riotous living of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:13).

The Edification of the New Convert and the Unbeliever

The strongest reasons for a Christian to abstain from wine (and other stimulants), however, have to do with a comparison of the "law of liberty" and "the law of love." The "law of liberty" teaches that we are free in Christ and therefore are not under the bondage of having to do or not do particular things in order to maintain our salvation (i.e., drinking wine, etc.). The "law of love," which leads to edification, however, teaches that Christians should choose to do or not do particular things for the sake of seeing others saved and strengthened in the faith (not drinking wine, etc.). These laws relate to our love and concern for other people as expressed by our attitudes and actions toward them. These "laws" specify that the believer's desire to see kingdom work progress overcome the believer's desire for certain personal pleasures or ways of life. When we are willing to re-prioritize our concerns, based on our love of Jesus, then it may be said that our hearts are given to those things which lead to edification.

This is important, because edification is demanded in Scripture. It means “building up,” and is described as the “strengthening of the spiritual life of Christians and congregations.”⁶ In fact, edification is considered to be of such primary importance that the Apostle Paul directs believers to “. . . Let all things be done for edification” (1 Corinthians 14:26c). Therefore, though certain things, habits, or activities are not inherently wrong, they may still prove to be less than acceptable concerning our service in the Lord. Thus, Paul also states, “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify.” (1 Corinthians 10:23). At the very heart of Christian service lies the purpose of bringing glory to God through building up one another. Therefore, the apostle wants the believer to be focused in obedient service, which means loving God with all our heart and loving our neighbor as ourselves.

In Romans 14:1-23, Paul deals specifically with the issue of edification in relation to certain practices, one of which is the Christians’ use of wine. There were evidently schisms in the church at Rome caused by the different ideas and culturally developed habits of the people. Some accused others of being less than spiritual because they did not keep certain feasts, eat certain foods, or observe certain days. Paul discusses these issues in verses one through thirteen by teaching the “law of liberty.” He reminds them that Christians are not bound by tradition or such practices (vv. 3, 5, 13a), but, at the same time, no man lives unto himself (vv. 7-8) and no one should put a “stumbling block” in a brother’s way (v. 13b). Thus, believers should not judge one another in regard to customs

⁶ Millard J. Erickson, *Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Co., 1986), 48.

and feasts because all have been made free in Jesus (John 8:36). Because believers are free, they participate in the “law of liberty.” That is, no believer is bound to keep traditions, and no believer should judge the spiritual walk of another believer based on these considerations.

After addressing these problems, he goes on to discuss the “law of love,” and deals with other questionable activities that were causing friction in the church. In verses thirteen through twenty-three, Paul says that it is not good to drink wine or eat meat (sacrificed to idols)⁷ if it causes a brother to stumble (v. 21; cf. 1 Corinthians 8:1-13). Though Paul teaches that wine is not inherently evil (vv. 14, 20), the use of it should be restricted if it is going to harm the faith of others (vv. 15, 20). Paul wishes to persuade believers to consider what influence their actions will have on others. Thus, he commands them not to “destroy the work of God for the sake of food” (v. 20). He likewise states that those who eat or drink that which they believe is offensive is committing sin (v. 20b, 23). Blessed is the estate of a man who “does not condemn himself in what he approves” (v. 22). The one who is willing to serve Christ according to these standards “is acceptable

⁷ The question related to “eating meat” is one that is also discussed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 8. Many pagan temples sacrificed meat to their gods. Subsequently, some of this meat was served in restaurants and some was sold in the marketplace. New converts, however, were offended, having come out of this idolatrous background, when they saw other Christians purchasing and eating this meat. Thus, Paul addresses the issue by making two points. One, he realizes that there is no god besides the true and living God. Thus, whether the cook grilling the meat was offering a sacrifice to his god was inconsequential--in Paul’s eyes there was no other god. The meat was simply cooked meat. However, even though he understood this, as other more mature Christians did, he insisted that the “law of love” be applied. That is, if a practice such as partaking of the meat sacrificed to idols makes a weak (ungrounded) brother stumble, then don’t do it. This is sound advice to be applied to any questionable activity for the modern believer.

to God and approved by men” (v. 18). Likewise, if one considers something to be in violation of Christian principle, even if there is no direct command concerning it in Scripture, then it is wrong for him to practice (v. 23). Thus, Paul sets forth the “law of love,” which is a standard by which to judge our love for Christ and others against our love for pleasure. Since drinking wine was causing some to “stumble,” which is the opposite of “edifying,” Paul admonished them, based on an appeal to love, not to drink. The “law of liberty” may allow it, but the “law of love” is a standard against it.

Concerning the command for edification, one might ask a number of questions. Does drinking wine promote edification of the body of Christ? Does it enhance one’s testimony for Christ? Will unbelievers be drawn to Christ by it? The answer to each of these is surely, “No.” As Alexander Strauch has noted,

Drunkenness has ruined countless lives. It is commonly reported that nearly half of the murders, suicides, and accidental deaths in America are related to alcohol. One in four families has some problem with alcohol, making alcohol one of the largest health problems in America. The misery and heartbreak that alcoholism has caused multitudes of families is beyond imagination. It reduces life expectancy, breaks up families, and destroys people financially. It’s a moral and spiritual problem of the greatest magnitude.⁸

Thus, lost people, new converts, and those ungrounded in the faith will not understand the pastor, deacon, or other Christian drinking wine or using drugs. A Christian who socially drinks, even in moderation, may be securely bound for heaven but may have a lack of love for Christ and those who are lost. To state this truth in the form of a question, it may be asked, “Do you love Jesus enough to put aside a pleasurable habit

⁸ Alexander Strauch, *The New Testament Deacon: The Church's Minister of Mercy* (Littleton, Colorado: Lewis & Roth Pub., 1992), 98.

for the sake of your witness to others?” Along with the Apostle Paul, the believer will want to know that he is in control of his life, being able to abstain from anything that is not beneficial for ministry. Paul says, “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful [i.e., “profitable”]. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any” (1 Corinthians 6:12).

According to Paul then, to understand that wine is not inherently evil can be seen as a matter of being “mature;” but the ability to put the love of Christ and the love of others above our personal pleasures is evidence of an even greater maturity. Thus, the “law of love” is an appeal to practice the greatest maturity. Generally, mature Christians do not have to be commanded to do or not do certain things because the “law of love,” as applied by the Holy Spirit, is the governing principle of their lives (cf. Romans 5:5).

The Admonitions for Spending Time Wisely

Peter indicates that enough time has been wasted in “drunkenness” and “drinking parties” (1 Peter 4:1-6). He says that now, since our conversion, we should be serious, using our time wisely in serving God because the end is near (1 Peter 4:7-11). Both Jesus (Matthew 24:45-51) and the Apostle Paul (Romans 13:11-14; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11) teach that drunkenness is a waste of time, preventing one from being obedient in his service for God. Our salvation is closer today than it was before; therefore every minute should count toward reaching others for Christ (Romans 13:11).

Conclusion

The Bible does not specifically call for abstinence from wine, but neither does it

encourage such usage.⁹ It should be noted that the Bible is filled with discouraging remarks about the use of wine. It brings on numerous moral and physical problems, it does not edify, and it can generally be considered a waste of valuable time. Participating in this habit may show a lack of wisdom, a lack of love, a lack of self-control, and a desire for pleasure over a desire to maintain a Christian witness. Thus, one should not be so intrigued with the story of “turning the water into wine,” as being perplexed at the person who “turns wine into water.”¹⁰

Because of the problems associated with alcohol in America, its use can only be an unwise habit for a Christian--especially a church leader. It appears that drinking wine does not suggest a superior Christian maturity but a lack of love and concern for other Christians and unbelievers. The money saved by abstaining from alcohol or drugs could be given to the poor; the extra time could be spent in prayer and discipling. Thus, the “law of liberty” may allow the moderate use of alcohol, the “law of love” no doubt restrains its use.

⁹ There are two admonitions in Scripture for the personal use of wine, both of which appear to be for medicinal purposes (Proverbs 31:6-7; 1 Timothy 5:23; cf. Luke 10:34). Today, in regard to both mental and physical ailments, it is no doubt better for someone to be under the supervision of a physician than to rely on self-help and home remedies such as alcohol.

¹⁰ Steve Brown, “Key Life Ministries,” on Joy 63, WRJZ radio, Knoxville, Tn., 27 October 1995.

APPENDIX D
DEACONS AND DEACONESSES?

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DEACONS AND DEACONESSES?

Likewise their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. 1 Timothy 3:11-12

An Introduction

A Brief Historical Overview

Throughout history the issue of women's ordination has been diversely understood, and has led to differing practices among the churches. Later in history, after the New Testament era, deaconesses served in the church by caring for martyrs, traveling Christians, prisoners, the sick and poor, women baptismal candidates, and other needs of women.¹ According to the *Apostolic Constitutions*, produced late in the fourth century, female deacons serving in these ways were being assistants to the clergy by functioning as intermediaries between them and the women of the congregation.² By the eleventh

¹ Dale Moody, *Romans*, in the *Broadman Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1970), 279, as cited in Herschel H. Hobbs, *Romans: A Verse by Verse Study* (Waco, Tx.: Word Books, 1977), 163.

² Howard Sainsbury, "Deaconess," in *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, gen. ed. J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corp., 1978), 285-86. Cited hereafter as Sainsbury, *NIDCC*.

century, however, the office of deaconess had become nonexistent in the church, partially due to fears that they might usurp priestly functions.³

According to Sainsbury, the revival of deaconesses in the liturgical Protestant churches of Europe started in 1836 through the work of Lutheran pastor Theodor Fliedner.⁴ He instituted an order of deaconesses near Dusseldorf, Germany, after becoming acquainted with this practice among the Mennonites.⁵ These unmarried women operated homes for ex-convicts, schools for children, and a hospital that gave instructions in nursing.⁶

In Baptist history, deaconesses were a part of the first church on record in modern times. According to a confession penned by John Smyth in 1609, *Short Confession of Faith in XX Articles by John Smyth*,⁷ “widows” were to serve along with men as deacons, attending to the poor and the sick.⁸ Smyth, like Fliedner many years after him, no doubt was influenced by the Mennonites. This practice, however, never became popular among Baptists; few references are ever made to deaconesses in their doctrinal statements.⁹

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Richard V. Pierard, “Fliedner, Theodor,” in *NIDCC*, 380.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge: The Judson Press, 1969), 99.

⁸ Ibid., 101.

⁹ For a fuller presentation of Baptist confessions of faith, refer to *Chapter 8: The Deacon Ministry in Baptist Life*.

The Contemporary Setting

The fabric of modern society has been increasingly woven with a thread of influence that emphasizes more significant leadership roles for women. This is true for the American community and, consequently, the Christian church. Because of this phenomenon, it has become necessary to evaluate certain Scriptures as to the role of women in the church. This is particularly true of passages addressing the offices of the church (i.e., pastor and deacon). Likewise, the current emphasis on this issue has resulted in a plethora of materials being produced.¹⁰ This being true, and given the purpose and scope of this writing, an exhaustive treatment of the role of women in the church will not be attempted. What will be considered are the passages of Scripture pertinent to a discussion of deaconesses.

The Arguments Presented

Usually two verses in the New Testament are used by those who favor the

¹⁰ For a fuller treatment of the issues, the following sources are recommended: Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Role of Women in the Church* (Charles Caldwell Ryrie, 1958; Chicago: Moody Press; Moody Press ed., 1970; Moody paperback ed., 1978); Beverly LaHaye, *The Desires of a Woman's Heart: Encouragement for Women When Traditional Values Are Challenged* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Pub., 1993); James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1981); George W. Knight, III, *The Role Relationship of Men and Women: New Testament Teaching* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985); John MacArthur, Jr., *Different By Design: Discovering God's Will for Today's Man and Woman* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books; 1994); Susan T. Foh, *Women & The Word of God: A Response to Biblical Feminism* (n. p.: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1979); Bonnidell Clouse and Robert G. Clouse, eds., *Women in Ministry: Four Views* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1989). For a more exhaustive and scholarly treatment, see John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, a division of Good News Pub., 1991), cited hereafter as *RBMW*.

interpretation that women were ordained as deaconesses in the early church. These two verses are Romans 16:1 (which possibly provides the “example” of a deaconess, Phoebe) and 1 Timothy 3:11 (which possibly provides a direct “teaching” concerning the qualifications of a deaconess). Both verses were given by the Apostle Paul, the first in about A. D. 57, and, the second, somewhere around A. D. 63. In addition to these two verses, however, it will also be important to consider Acts 6:1-6 which provides a record of the origin of the deacon ministry in the early church. Philippians 1:1 is the only other verse in the New Testament that makes a specific reference to the office of deacon, but it provides no direct insight on the issue of deaconesses. Therefore, the first three passages mentioned above will serve as the basis of this discussion.

Romans 16:1-2: Phoebe, a “Servant” of the Church at Cenchrea

Although Romans 16:1 is often debated with regard to deaconesses, the passage actually provides no concrete evidence on the subject. Whether the word *diakonos* in this case is being used in a technical or general sense renders the passage inconclusive. That is, does the reference to Phoebe’s being a *diakonos* designate her as holding the office of deacon in the church at Cenchrea,¹¹ or is it merely affirming that she was recognized as a tremendous and relentless “helper” in that local church (16:2)? With this question in

¹¹ Cenchrea was a small town located about eight miles east of Corinth. It served as the seaport for Corinth’s trade to the East. Paul may have founded a church there on his second missionary journey, or the Christian message may have spread there from his work at Corinth (2 Corinthians 1:1). In any event, Paul had sailed from this port several years earlier on his way from Corinth to Ephesus (Acts 18:18). (Merrill C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1967], s.v. “Cenchrea,” 150; Everett F. Harrison, “Romans,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 10 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1976], 161.)

mind, the circumstances that occasioned the Apostle's writing of the letter to the Roman church should be considered.

To begin, Paul desired to go to Rome himself (15:23) but for whatever reason(s) had been hindered from doing so (15:22). The most recent circumstance that prevented his journey was the immediate need for him to minister to the saints at Jerusalem (15:25-27). However, hoping to fellowship with them for a while, Paul still planned on visiting the church at Rome (15:24b, 32) and then with their help, launch a new missionary effort into Spain (15:24, 28-32). This is the reason for Paul's letter--he wanted the Roman church to know what he believed concerning the gospel (thus, the strong doctrinal content in Chapters 1-13) and what he desired concerning future ministry plans. In the meantime, this all important letter would prepare them for his coming and for his hopes of their helping him take the gospel to new and unreached areas of the world (15:20-21).

It is at this point that Phoebe comes into play. She was, no doubt, to be the one who would graciously and willingly carry this letter to the church at Rome during the Apostle's time of need (16:1-2). Although it is supposition that this assignment was given to Phoebe, according to H. A. W. Meyer, it is "a supposition which there is nothing to contradict."¹² Since she was to carry the epistle, Paul found it necessary to introduce her to the church. Because the letter was of such great importance, he would not want her to be suspected as a fraud or the letter itself declared a forgery (Cf. 1 Corinthians 16:21;

¹² Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Hand-Book to the Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1884), 565, as cited in D. Edmond Hiebert, *Volume 2: The Pauline Epistles*, in *An Introduction to the New Testament*, rev. ed., 3 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1954, 1977; Moody Paperback ed., 1981), 176.

Colossians 4:18; 2 Thessalonians 3:17).¹³

Barclay states that it was a common practice in the ancient world to send letters of commendation or introduction, called *sustatikai epistolai*, with someone going to live in a new town. This, he says, is exactly what Paul was doing to recommend Phoebe to the church at Rome.¹⁴ Whether Phoebe had already made plans to travel to Rome on other business or whether she was being sent on a special trip by the Apostle is unknown.¹⁵ In any event, it was requested by Paul that the church “assist her in whatever business she has need of you” (16:2). Evidently Paul placed great confidence in her abilities and considered her service in his ministry to be invaluable. No doubt, Phoebe was a most trustworthy, dependable, and important person in the kingdom’s work.

But who was this woman and what type of service did she render? What is known of Phoebe is limited to these two verses, leaving the modern reader little information about her personal life. However, a great deal concerning her spiritual life can be gleaned from Paul’s commendation of her (16:1-2). Paul describes her by using four “endearing”¹⁶ terms: *sister*, *saint*, *helper*, and *servant*.

Phoebe as a sister. The first term used by Paul to introduce this godly lady was

¹³ Hobbs, 162.

¹⁴ William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans*, in *The Daily Study Bible Series*, rev. ed., (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 207.

¹⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, in *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, gen. ed. R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; copyright, The Tyndale Press, 1963), 266.

¹⁶ R. Kent Huges, *Romans: Righteousness From Heaven*, in *Preaching the Word Series* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, a division of Good News Pub., 1991), 297.

sister (v. 1) This indicated that she was a full-fledged member of the family of God. She was clearly identified with her local church and was not an imposter wanting to infiltrate the church of Rome. Because Phoebe was clearly identified as a sister of the church at Cenchrea, she should be fully accepted by the believers at Rome. Since God's family is one, each genuine member is to be received by the others in love. Paul wanted the church at Rome to extend full hospitality to their sister in the Lord.

Phoebe as a saint. A second term used by Paul to describe Phoebe was *saint* (v. 2). Paul often used the designation "saint" when addressing a believer or a body of believers.¹⁷ This term indicated that she had been born again, that she had been set apart by the blood of Jesus. Based on that foundation, the Holy Spirit was thus enabling her to live a life that progressively manifested holiness and honor. The reality of her salvation and the openness of her testimony for the Lord were no doubt evident to all who knew her. Every person desiring to serve God in a meaningful way must have these basic characteristics.

Phoebe as a helper. A third term used by Paul in his description of Phoebe was *helper* (v. 2). The Greek word for "helper," *prostatis*, means "protectress," "patroness," or "helper."¹⁸ It was used to describe a "woman who renders assistance fr[om] her

¹⁷ For example, see Acts 26:10; Romans 1:7; 15:25, 26, 31; 16:15; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 16:1, 15; 2 Corinthians 1:1; 13:13; Ephesians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:2; Philemon 1:5, 7; Hebrews 6:10; 13:24; Jude 1:3; Revelation 5:8; etc.

¹⁸ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d ed., trans. by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich; rev. by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 718. Cited hereafter as *BAGD*. Romans 16:2 is the only place this word is used in the New Testament.

resources.”¹⁹ According to Vaughan and Corley, the word *prostatis* was used of wealthy patrons in Jewish communities.²⁰ Sanday and Headlam suggest “that Phoebe was a person of some wealth and position who was thus able to act as a patroness of a small and struggling community.”²¹

Based on this description of Phoebe as a *prostatis*, some writers have attempted to make Phoebe an “overseer” or “pastor” or “leader” in the church at Cenchrea. However, this is quite unlikely because Paul states that Phoebe was also his “helper” (*prostatis*). Though an exhaustive treatment is not in order here, it should simply be noted that it is highly questionable whether Paul considered Phoebe to hold a position of authority over him. If so, he considered her to hold a position of authority over one of the Lord’s apostles. However, Paul was so sure of his high level of apostolic authority (1 Corinthians 14:37-38; Galatians 1:8-9; 2 Thessalonians 3:14) that he recognized no one but Christ as having greater authority, not even the Jerusalem apostles (Galatians 1:6-7, 11-12, 15-17; 2:11-14).²²

¹⁹ *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, Currently available only in electronic form (Copyright by Timothy and Barbara Friberg, 1994), s. v. “προστάτις.” (Cited hereafter as *ANLEX*.) *ANLEX* material is taken from *BibleWorks for Windows*, version 3.0 (Big Fork, MT.: Hermeneutika; Copyright by Michael S. Bushell, 1992-1995).

²⁰ Curtis Vaughan and Bruce Corley, *Romans* in the *Bible Study Commentary* series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Corp., 1976), 165. Cited hereafter as *BSC*.

²¹ William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* in *The International Critical Commentary*, 5th ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1902), 418, as cited in *BSC*, 165.

²² Thomas R. Schreiner, “The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership: A Survey of Old and New Testament Examples and Teaching,” Chapter 11 in *RBMW*, 219.

Conversely, if it is seen that Paul was speaking in general rather than technical terms, what does he mean when he calls Phoebe a “helper.” Evidently, Phoebe was a wealthy woman who graciously and generously shared her prosperity with the church; maybe she even opened her home for church meetings. She may possibly have had a similar relationship to the church at Cenchrea as Lydia did to the church at Philippi (Acts 16:11-15). In any event, there is no doubt that Phoebe was a “bright” and “radiant” star in the kingdom’s work.²³

Phoebe as a servant. A fourth term used by Paul to describe Phoebe was “servant” (*diakonos*). This Greek word is often translated in its general sense as “servant” or “minister,” indicating one who performs spiritual service on behalf of Christ. In its technical sense, it is translated in the New Testament as “deacon,” indicating a church office or officer (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8, 12, 13). Additionally, there is no distinction between the masculine and feminine forms of this word in the Greek. Grammatically then, if taken in the technical sense, the term may be understood in the feminine as “deaconess” or in the masculine as “deacon.”²⁴

It is this term that makes the passage relevant to the discussion at hand because

²³ According to Harrison (*EBC*), 161, the literal meaning of Phoebe is “bright” or “radiant.”

²⁴ Hobbs, 162-63. See also Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House; Copyright Wayne Grudem, 1994), 919, n. 25. Cited hereafter as Grudem, *ST*. Grudem states: “This is the difficulty in Romans 16:1, where Phoebe is called a ‘servant’ or a ‘deaconess’ or ‘deacon’ (this type of Greek noun has the same form in both masculine and feminine genders, so it is simply a question of which English word is most appropriate) . . .” (919).

some interpreters have understood *diakonos* to be used here in its feminine, technical sense as “deaconess.” Ascribing to *diakonos* a technical, non-feminine, meaning, the more radical feminist interpreters have simply called Phoebe a “deacon” (Cf., 16:1, NRSV). By rendering this translation, all gender distinction is effectively absolved.

The question at hand is whether *diakonos* is being used generally to describe Phoebe as a “spiritual servant,” or technically to describe her as a “deacon” and thus a church officer. Robertson accepts the latter position since *diakonos* is followed by “of the church.” He insists that this phrase specifically ties *diakonos* to a local church, and as such, indicates an official position. He does not tend to be dogmatic about this interpretation, however. It should be noted that apart from this connection, there is nothing within the passage that warrants such an interpretation.

Conversely, there may be several indicators that *diakonos* is being used here in a general sense. Firstly, *diakonos* is commonly used in the book of Romans in a non-technical way.²⁵ For instance, no one would suspect that Paul meant to identify himself as a “deacon” in the church at Jerusalem simply because he was going there to “minister” (15:25, *diakonew*) and render “service” (15:31, *diakonia*). In like fashion, the statement claiming Jesus became a “servant” (*diakonos*) to Israel was not meant to indicate He held the office of “deacon” among the Jewish people (15:8).

Similarly, what has been said concerning the use of *diakonos* in the book of Romans is true of the whole corpus of New Testament writings. That is, of the twenty-

²⁵ In the book of Romans *diakonos* is used four times: 13:4 (2x), 15:8, 16:1; *diakonew* is used one time: 15:25; and *diakonia* is used four times: 11:13, 12:7 (2x), 15:31.

nine uses of *diakonos* in the New Testament, along with thirty-seven uses of *diakonew* and thirty-four uses of *diakonia*, there are only five clear instances (contained in only two passages) where an “office” is being designated.²⁶ One of these uses occurs in the salutation of the epistle to the Philippians (1:1), with the other four uses occurring in 1 Timothy 3 (verses 8, 10, 12, 13). In addition to these distinct uses, it is also probable that the men set aside to “serve” (*diakonew*) tables as an act of “ministry” (*diakonia*) to the widows in Acts 6:1-3 is a reference to the first “deacons.” Apart from these instances, however, there are no references to the “office” of deacon in the New Testament.

Secondly, *diakonos* is used in Romans in a general sense by Paul when he makes specific mention of the spiritual gift of “ministry” (*diakonia*; 12:7). Hence, the idea of spiritual giftedness for service may have been Paul’s emphasis when describing Phoebe as a spiritual servant; that is, service was one of Phoebe’s Christian attributes.

Thirdly, Paul does not major on the technical positions of any of the twenty-eight

²⁶ *Diakonos* (noun, used of “the servant”) is used 29 times in 27 verses of the New Testament = Matthew 20:26; 22:13; 23:11; Mark 9:35; 10:43; John 2:5, 9; 12:26; Romans 13:4; 15:8; 16:1; 1 Corinthians 3:5, 6; 2 Corinthians 6:4; 11:15, 23; Galatians 2:17; Ephesians 3:7; 6:21; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:7, 23, 25; 4:7; 1 Timothy 3:8, 12; 4:6.

Diakonia (noun; used of “the service rendered”) is used 34 times in 32 verses in the New Testament = Luke 10:40; Acts 1:17, 25; 6:1, 4; 11:29; 12:25; 20:24; 21:19; Romans 11:13; 12:7; 15:31; 1 Corinthians 12:5; 16:15; 2 Corinthians 3:7, 8, 9; 4:1; 5:18; 6:3; 8:4; 9:1, 12, 13; 11:8; Ephesians 4:12; Colossians 4:17; 1 Timothy 1:12; 2 Timothy 4:5, 11; Hebrews 1:14; Revelation 2:19.

Diakonew (verb, used to designate “the act of serving”) is used 37 times in 32 verses in the New Testament = Matthew 4:11; 8:15; 20:28; 25:44; 27:55; Mark 1:13, 31; 10:45; 15:41; Luke 4:39; 8:3; 10:40; 12:37; 17:8; 22:26, 27; John 12:2, 26; Acts 6:2; 19:22; Romans 15:25; 2 Corinthians 3:3; 8:19, 20; 1 Timothy 3:10, 13; 2 Timothy 1:18; Philemon 1:13; Hebrews 6:10; 1 Peter 1:12; 4:10, 11.

persons described along with Phoebe in Romans 16.²⁷ It may be seen from a survey of this chapter and the whole book of Romans that technical positions, or “offices,” receive little or no attention. Reasonably, then, the designation of Phoebe as a “servant” is not meant to emphasize an official position but to highlight a Christian attribute. Hence, Phoebe is merely described according to her spiritual and practical service as are all the others listed in Romans 16. Furthermore, Paul regularly describes co-workers throughout the New Testament by emphasizing their general service, not their technical position.²⁸

²⁷ The following shows the descriptions that Paul uses in Romans 16 to be quite general in nature: (v. 3) Priscilla and Aquila - “fellow workers;” (v. 5) Epaphroditus - “my beloved” and “the firstfruits of Achaia;” (v. 6) Mary - “who labored much;” (v. 7) Andronicus and Junia - “my countrymen and my fellow prisoners;” (v. 8) Amplias - “my beloved in the Lord;” (v. 9) Urbanus - “our fellow worker in Christ;” (v. 9) Stachys - “my beloved;” (v. 10) Apelles - “approved in Christ;” (v. 10) Aristobulus - no designation, but only encouraged to greet those of his household; (v. 11) Herodian - “my countryman;” (v. 11) the household of Narcissus - “who are in the Lord;” (v. 12) Tryphena and Tryphosa - “who have labored in the Lord;” (v. 12) Persis - “beloved” and “who labored much in the Lord;” (v. 13) Rufus - “chosen in the Lord;” (v. 13) his mother and mine - no designation; (v. 14) Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren with them - no designation; (v. 15) Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them - no designation; (v. 21) Timothy - “my fellow worker;” (v. 21) Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater - “my countrymen;” (v. 22) Tertius - no designation, but penned the epistle for Paul; (v. 23) Gaius - “my host and the host of the whole church;” and (v. 23) Quartus - “a brother.” Each of these terms appear to be used as general descriptive terms, not titles. In comparison, it is easy to see these descriptions are of the same generality, tenor, and train of thought as those used of Phoebe - “sister,” “servant,” “saint,” and “helper.”

Only two technical designations are used in this whole chapter. One, in reference to the “apostles,” which is not used of an individual but used to designate a collective and distinct group (v. 7). The other title is used in reference to Erastus who served as “treasurer of the city” (v. 23). Thus, the only technical designations given seem to have been for the purpose identification, not for an emphasis on their respective positions.

²⁸ Though this is not an exhaustive survey, it should help to substantiate the above proposition: 1 Corinthians 1:1, Sosthenes - “our brother;” 16:11, Apollos - “our brother;” 2 Corinthians 1:1, Timothy - “our brother;” 2:13, Titus - “my brother;” Ephesians 6:21, Tychicus - “beloved brother and faithful minister;” Philippians 2:19, 22 - “a son;” 2:25,

Fourthly, it is important to consider how *diakonos* has been translated in 16:1 in the more reliable versions of the New Testament. The King James, New King James, American Standard (1901), New American Standard, and New International versions have all understood the term in a general rather than technical sense.²⁹ The Living Bible probably captures the essence of Paul's meaning quite well by recognizing the general sense and endearing nature of not only this term, but of the whole passage:

Phoebe, A Dear Christian woman from the town of Cenchreae, will be

Epaphroditus - "my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier. . . your messenger;" 4:2-3, Euodia and Synthche - "women who labored with me in the gospel;" 4:3, Clement - "fellow worker;" Colossians 1:1, Timothy - "our brother;" 1:7, Epaphras - "our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister;" 4:7-8, Tychicus - "a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant;" 4:9, Onesimus - "a faithful and beloved brother;" 4:10 - Aristarchus - "my fellow prisoner;" 4:10-11, Mark and Justus - "fellow workers;" 4:12, Epaphras - "a bondservant of Christ;" 1 Timothy 1:2, Timothy - "a true son in the faith;" 2 Timothy 1:2, Timothy - "a beloved son;" Titus 1:4, Titus - "a true son in our common faith;" Philemon 1:1, Timothy - "our brother;" 1:1, Philemon - "our beloved friend and fellow laborer;" 1:2, Apphia - "beloved;" 1:2, Archippus - "our fellow soldier;" 1:23, Epaphras - "my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus;" 1:24, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke - "my fellow laborers."

Paul does, many times, emphasize the technical position of "apostle." This emphasis, no doubt, was due to the inherent importance and authority associated with this calling. It appears, however, that he only emphasized his apostolic position when the circumstances necessitated his doing so: (1) When introducing himself as God's chosen vessel for writing or teaching Christian doctrine (Romans 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:1; 15:8-9; Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 1 Timothy 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:1; Titus 1:1), and (2) When defending his position as a God-called apostle against the attacks of false prophets (2 Corinthians 1:1 with 10:7-13:10).

At other times, when stronger language was not needed, Paul simply presented himself as a fellow believer in Christ (Philippians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; Philemon 1:1, 14). Many times he spoke of himself as a "bondservant" or "prisoner" of God, while always maintaining that his position as an apostle was initiated and given by God, not by man or his own design.

²⁹ Other less reliable versions have translated *diakonos* variously: The RSV, Phillips, Williams, and Jerusalem read "deaconess;" the NRSV reads "deacon;" and the NEB, rather presumptuously, reads "who holds office in the congregation."

coming to see you soon. She has worked hard in the church there. Receive her as your sister in the Lord, giving her a warm Christian welcome. Help her in every way you can, for she has helped many in their needs, including me. 16:1-2, LB

Finally, evidence for understanding *diakonos* in this passage in its non-technical sense is found when considering its similar use by Paul in 1 Corinthians. This comparison is significant because Paul was visiting at Corinth during the time he wrote his epistle to the Romans.³⁰ It was also from Corinth that Paul sent Phoebe with the letter to the Roman church. Thus, Corinth provides the immediate geographical and religious context for both Paul and Phoebe (though nothing is explicitly shared about Phoebe in the Corinthian epistles) at the time Romans was written.

When surveying 1 Corinthians, it appears that the church at Corinth met primarily in homes. For instance, Chloe, another godly woman, had opened her home as a gathering place for some of the saints in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:11). Likewise, Stephanas and his household, devoting “themselves to the ministry [*diakonia*] of the saints,” had opened their home to the church (1 Corinthians 16:15).³¹ Consequently, that Phoebe had also opened her home to the saints in the area of Cenchrea (a port town of Corinth) is believable. The church at Cenchrea, no doubt, was considered a part of the church proper at Corinth due to its close proximity.³²

³⁰ Hiebert, 175-76, says that Romans was written by Paul on his third missionary journey during a three month stay at Corinth in about February, A. D. 58 (Acts 20:2-3).

³¹ James Denny, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol. 2 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1900), 717, as cited in *BSC*, 165.

³² J. Armitage Robinson, “Deacon and Deaconess,” *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (New York: Macmillan, 1914), 1039, as cited from a lengthy quote in Ryrie, 89.

Phoebe then was not being called a “deacon” in the official sense any more than Stephanas and his whole household were being designated as “deacons.” She, like Stephanas and his household, was acknowledged as someone who unselfishly rendered spiritual service in the church. A solid example is therefore given to substantiate the interpretation that Phoebe was not being designated a “deacon.” Considering the methodology of Paul, seeing that he puts little emphasis on offices in the book of Corinthians, it seems best to understand *diakonos* here in its unofficial sense.

To summarize, Phoebe is described by Paul as a genuinely committed and able worker. With a warm heart, he wonderfully recommends Phoebe to the church at Rome by the use of several endearing terms. Though Phoebe probably held no “official” position as deacon, she was evidently noted as being “outstanding in her ministry of aiding and befriending others.”³³ It is also evident that she was greatly used by the Apostle and by God for delivering one of the greatest and most important pieces of literature of all time. The summary given by J. Armitage Robinson therefore appears to represent a fair and accurate interpretation of this text:

Of Phoebe, then, we may say with security that she is a witness of the important services rendered by women in the primitive Church; but in tracing the history of the diaconate it will not be wise to assume that the word *diakonos* is used of her in the strictly official sense.³⁴

³³ Harrison, 161, n. 2.

³⁴ Robinson, 1039, as cited in Ryrie, 89.

1 Timothy 3:11: “Wives” or “Women”?

The Translation of Gune

The first argument from this passage by those who favor the ordination of women to the diaconate concerns the word “wives” (*gunaikas*). The root word *gune* is used to designate either: (1) a “wife;” or (2) a “woman [or] female” as distinct from a “man.”³⁵ Some scholars have considered this verse to be a reference to “women,” and thus, a separate order of female deacons or “deaconesses.” Conversely, however, although *gune* can be translated “women,” the context of this passage suggests that it should be translated “wives.” In two other immediate instances where this word is used (vv. 2, 12), it is clear that a specific reference is being made to “wives.” Thus, consistency suggests that *gune* should also be translated “wives” in verse 11.

Even if one accepts the interpretation of *gune* as “women” in this text, there remains the question as to why Paul did not use a more specific designation if introducing a separate group of deaconesses. This question has been explained by pointing out that there is no distinction between the masculine and feminine forms of *diakonos* in the Greek. Accordingly, proponents of women’s ordination say, *gune* would have been the only logical word available to indicate female deacons.

This premises, however, does not hold true. The Greek language provided at least two options for Paul had he wanted to indicate female deacons. He could have used the feminine article with the word deacon (τὰς διακόνους), or he could have used a feminine

³⁵ *ANLEX*, s. v. “γυνή .”

form of deacon, *διακονίσσα*, as found in post New Testament church history.³⁶ With these available options, why did Paul not choose a more specific designation? The only legitimate answer is that the deacons' wives, not an order of deaconesses, are being addressed in this verse. Specificity would have been especially important had he been establishing a new order in the church. If a new order of deaconesses were being introduced, a more specific designation would certainly have been required, especially since such a group is not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture. Further, to use a specific designation for deaconesses would have aligned with his consistent and specific identification of the male deacons as seen in verses 8, 10, 12, and 13. Rather than supporting the theory of deaconesses in the early church, the use of *gune* actually denies their existence.

The Missing Modifier

A second argument concerns the lack of a modifier in the Greek text for the word *gune*. The possessive “*their*” in the English text has been supplied by the translators. Accordingly, some scholars say that a separate order of female deacons, not deacons' wives, is indicated in the text. Thomas R. Schreiner has argued that had Paul meant to speak of wives in this passage “he could have made this very clear by adding *of deacons* (*diakonōn* or *autōn*).”³⁷ Thus the text would have read “the wives of the deacons.” Likewise, Bernard has said that had Paul intended to designate these women as the

³⁶ Ryrie, 90-91.

³⁷ Schreiner, *RBMW*, 213-14.

deacons' spouses he surely would have said “*their*” wives (τὰς γυναικας αὐτῶν, lit. “the wives of them” or “their wives”).³⁸ Others have noted that there is no article preceding the word, leaving it quite general in nature.

Since no modifier is present with *gune* (i.e., either “wives of deacons” or “*their* wives”), Schreiner believes there is a strong implication that Paul “was speaking of women in general, not just of the wives of deacons.”³⁹ However, Wayne Grudem has shown that Paul, and the other writers of Scripture, often omit the possessive when speaking of close relationships (Cf., Colossians 3:18-19; Ephesians 5:22-25; 1 Corinthians 7:2-4, 11, 14, 33; Matthew 18:25; Mark 10:2). He says,

It is true that Paul simply says “the wives” rather than “their wives,” but Greek frequently omits possessive adjectives when the person named (brother, sister, father, mother, etc.) would have an obvious relationship to the person being discussed in the immediate context.⁴⁰

Thus, no good reason exists to deny that the women mentioned here are to be understood as “*their*” wives.

Concerning the lack of a definite article being used with *gune*, George Knight has noted that Paul spoke anarthrously of several people in the immediate context (i.e., deacons, vv. 8, 12, 13; children, vv. 3, 12; wife, vv. 2, 12; husband, vv. 2, 12).⁴¹ Again,

³⁸ J. H. Bernard, *The Pastoral Epistles*, in *The Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges*, [gen. ed. J. J. S. Perowne] (Cambridge: University Press, 1899; repr. 1906), 58.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Grudem, *ST*, 919, n. 25.

⁴¹ George W. Knight, III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, eds. I. Howard Marshall and W.

considering the context, little doubt remains that *gune* should be rendered as “the wives,” if not “their wives.”

The Meaning and Purpose of “Likewise”

A third argument is based on the use of “likewise” (*hosautos*), which means “similarly” or “in the same way.”⁴² Since this word is often used in the New Testament to introduce a new category (i.e., v. 8), some scholars have concluded that a third office is being presented. However, this argument does not lend any credence to the position which supports female deacons. Although “likewise” may be introducing a new group, this group has already been identified as the deacons’ spouses, not an order of deaconesses. Hence, that a new category of persons is being introduced stands uncontested--the real question concerns the identity of the persons being introduced. It is the contention of the writer that the persons being introduced are the deacons’ wives. Consequently, “likewise” is showing that all the qualifications given for the husbands should “in the same way” be met by their wives. This understanding also better explains the absence of a specific designation for the supposed deaconesses. In conclusion, “their wives” naturally fits the immediate context and is undoubtedly the group being introduced.

The Absence of Any Qualifications for the Bishop’s Wife

Some have contended that since no qualifications are listed for the bishop’s wife

Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1992), 172. Cited hereafter as Knight, *PE*.

⁴² *BAGD*, 899.

(vv. 1-7), it would be unusual to have qualifications given for the deacons' wives.

However, when the different roles of bishop and deacon are considered, the reason for including qualifications for deacons' wives becomes apparent. As Bernard says "it is to be remembered that a deacons' wife would of necessity share his work which was largely occupied with the sick and needy, and it is thus intelligible that it would be necessary to have an eye to her character in the selection of her husband for the diaconate."⁴³ He then explains, "whereas the wife of an ἐπιλοκοπος is in no way partner of his responsibilities, and should not be permitted to meddle in the administration of the Church."⁴⁴

According to this line of reasoning, therefore, the bishop's wife would not be involved in the day to day administration of the church, whereas the deacon's wife would prove to be a constant companion to him in their ministry to the poor. Her involvement with her husband's ministry would be further necessitated since his ministry includes frequent contact and association with single women. Finally, since the church's ministry to the poor and helpless will require the presence of women, logic suggests that these women would be the wives of deacons, not single ladies in the church.

Related to this argument is the suggestion of some that *gune* could not mean deacons' wives since no domestic duties are listed for her. However, it is more logical to conclude that such domestic duties are covered in the qualification of verse 12. There, the husband is required to have a well-ordered house. Having a well-ordered house would no doubt include the domestic aspects of home life that are shared elsewhere in Scripture in

⁴³ Bernard, 59.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

regard to believing women (i.e., Proverbs 31:10-31). Having a God-centered domestic life, then, would be part of the wholesomeness required for serving as a deacon.

Further, the qualifications given here concerning wives are those which would relate to her involvement in the church's public ministry; the qualifications concerning her private or home life are included with those of her husband. Each of the qualifications mentioned here would be most important for anyone who would be regularly visiting church members in their homes. Thus, the only qualifications given here are the ones that would directly apply to the wife's work with her husband in ministry outside the home. The deacon and his wife would be required to minister together, due to the nature of their ministry, much more often than the bishop and his wife.

The Parallel Qualifications

Some have argued that the qualifications given for the "women" in verse 11 parallel the qualifications given for the "men" in verses 8 and 9. It is thereby concluded, that since the women have a complete list of qualifications, as do the men, a separate order of deaconesses is indicated. When comparing qualifications, as in the following chart, many similarities are noted:

<i>Category</i>	<i>Qualification for Men</i>	<i>Qualification for Women</i>
Disposition	reverent	reverent
Demeanor	not double tongued	not given to slander
	not given to much wine	temperate
	not greedy	temperate
Dedication	holding . . . the faith with a pure conscience	faithful in all things

Existing similarities, however, merely prove that the character of the wife, while ministering outside the home with her husband, should be as solid as her husband's. Furthermore, several problems relate to this "parallelism." For example, the two sets of qualifications are separated by the requirement for testing in verse 10. Surely, had Paul been thinking of a separate order of women deacons, he would also have wanted them to be tested before serving. This being so, he seemingly would have put the two sets of qualifications together, placing both of them before the requirement for testing. However, when considering wives, the order makes sense in that the wife's testing would "likewise" be incorporated in the same process as her husbands.

The Marital Status of the "Women" of Verse 11

Another problem also exists in the parallelism if an order of deaconesses is being presented. That is, there are no marital qualifications for these women. This omission is significant because all other church officials listed in Scripture have marital requirements (Cf., the bishop, v. 2; the deacon, v. 12). Even ladies being considered for the church's widow's list were required to meet certain marital standards (5:9). How then can this marked difference be explained if deaconesses are being introduced at this point--it cannot. As George Knight has stated, "The omission can, however, be explained if the requirement is inherent in their position as wives of the δῆκονοι."⁴⁵

Apart from the problem of no marital qualifications, there are other problems relating to the marital status of the women presented in verse 11. Specifically, there are

⁴⁵ Knight, *PE*, 171.

complications if she is married and there are complications if she is not married. If it is required that she be married, a number of problems are evident. As mentioned above, there are no qualifications by which she would be guided. Also, it would be impossible for any woman to be the husband of one wife. If it is argued, and there is no good reason for doing so, that this qualification should not be related to deaconesses, then the previous problem of having no marital qualifications still exists. Even if one believes the requirement should be reworded to suit women (i.e., “let deaconesses be the wife of one husband”), thus serving as an understood but not stated requirement, problems still exist. That is, she would be required to “rule” (*proistimi*) her home well. However, to demand that a deaconess “rule” her home and children well is a violation of the clear biblical principle of male headship in the home (Genesis 3:16-17; Ephesians 5:22-6:4; Colossians 3:18-21; Titus 2:4-5; 1 Peter 3:1-7). Though it is not a problem to have the mother “rule” her children, since both mother and father are authority figures in the home (Deuteronomy 5:16; 6:4-9; Ephesians 6:1-4; Colossians 3:20-21), it is a violation of scriptural principles to imply that she rule the whole house. Thus, that she be single is the only option left.

Requiring the deaconess to be single, however, goes against the standard regulation for marriage among all people, including church officers; celibacy is to be the exception, not the rule (Genesis 2:20-24; 1 Timothy 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6; Cf., 1 Corinthians 7:7; Matthew 19:12). As a matter of fact, to deny marriage as the biblical standard is considered demonic (1 Timothy 4:1-3).

Furthermore, there are only three possible categories for those who are single: (1) single through divorce, (2) single through widowhood, or (3) single and never married.

Being divorced would prohibit a woman from becoming a deaconess based on the general restrictions concerning divorce for church officials (Cf., Titus 1:6). A widow would also be excluded; younger widows are encouraged to remarry (1 Timothy 5:14), while older widows, above sixty years of age, are to be primary recipients of deacon ministry (Acts 6:1-3; 1 Timothy 5:3-10). The position of women who have never been married has been dealt with in the previous paragraph--the standard is marriage. Furthermore, the unmarried deaconess would become disqualified upon marriage and/or at age sixty.

The Logic and Structure of the Passage

A further oddity exists if verse 11 is understood as introducing deaconesses--the passage lacks continuity. It seems unlikely that Paul would stop his discussion of male deacons, insert one verse (v. 11) for female deacons, and then return to the qualifications for male deacons. This ordering would be no different from Paul inserting several qualifications for the deacons in the middle of his discussion on bishops. This would prove to be even more confusing since no efforts are made to specifically identify the extraneous group. That Paul would insert such a group without identifying them more clearly is almost unthinkable. Such an arrangement would lend confusion to his discussion and make aimless his hopes for clarity.

However, when verses 11 and 12 are taken as a unit that is describing the deacon's home life, perfect sense can be made of the passage. Verse 11 discusses his spouse's qualifications, and verse 12 discusses qualifications regarding his relationship with his wife and his children. Hence, the qualifications given for the deacon outside the home are

listed in verses 8-10; the qualifications given for the deacon inside the home are listed in verses 11-12. After presenting this well ordered set, Paul then offers a word of encouragement to those who would serve faithfully, thus completing the qualifications for the deacon. When understood this way, the passage has a coherent symmetry.

Acts 6:1-7: An Ultimate Example

Acts 6:1-7 is seldom referenced by those who argue for the ordination of women to the diaconate. However, this passage is foundational to the deacon ministry and proves to be vitally important in the discussion of deaconesses. Two things in this passage specifically speak against the ordination of deaconesses during the New Testament period. One, the apostles told the church to seek out seven “men” (6:3). The word used here is not the generic, *anthropos*, used of humankind in general but the gender specific word *aner*, used to distinguish between male and female. Had the selection of the first deacons in the Jerusalem church been open to both male and female candidates, no doubt the former term would have been utilized. Thus, the apostles call specifically for men, as opposed to women, in this context. Two, following this advice, all seven persons chosen by the church were men. Thus, both by command and example, the early church limited its leadership in the diaconate to the men of the church.

Concluding Comments

To conclude, several things are noted. First of all, though women have served in the diaconate at different periods of church history, this practice has not been widespread. Further, it is Scripture, not church history, that is authoritative. Secondly, it is clear from

the preceding survey of the New Testament that women did not serve as deaconesses in the apostolic church. The only two verses that could even possibly be construed as suggesting such a practice, Romans 16:1 and 1 Timothy 3:11, have both been shown as sorely lacking in evidence. Conversely, when studied in detail, they prove to show just the opposite--women were not a part of the official diaconate. Finally, Acts 6:1-7 should remove all doubt about this issue; although the two previous verses in Romans and Timothy may be unclear to some, the Acts passage could not be.

Finally, this interpretation is in agreement with the overall picture given in Scripture concerning the role of women in the church. Women in the New Testament are seen as being highly gifted, highly intelligent, and deeply involved in ministry. Even in Romans 16, where Phoebe is mentioned, at least 8 of the 28 persons recognized are women. However, they are not seen filling primary leadership roles. For instance, each book of the Bible was written by a man, each of the Lord's apostles were men, every clearly identifiable elder was a man, and Jesus, the Son of God, came in the form of a man. In similar fashion, it is specifically avowed by the inspired Scriptures that women must not serve in any capacity of teaching or holding authority over men (1 Timothy 2:11-15; 1 Corinthians 14:34-35). These principles are not the bias of male bigots but are anchored in what God set forth as proper gender roles in the garden (Genesis 2:15-20; 1 Timothy 2:11-14; 1 Corinthians 11:8-12). Furthermore, while the office of deacon is not a position of authority, but of service, it is nonetheless a primary position of leadership. For this reason, women are not eligible for ordination to the diaconate.

Though much emphasis has been placed on this issue in recent years, there is still

no biblical justification for the practice of women's ordination. Women provided vital service in the New Testament church, but they were not ordained. This is the same interpretation held by Barclay, who states the following concerning Phoebe:

Sometimes she [Phoebe] is called a *deaconess*, but it is not likely that she held what might be called an official position in the Church. There can have been no time in the Christian Church when the work of women was not of infinite value. It must have been specially so in the days of the early Church. In the case of baptism by total immersion, as it then was, in the visitation of the sick, in the distribution of food to the poor, women must have played a big part in the life and work of the Church, but they did not at that time hold any official position.⁴⁶

Further, for someone who genuinely wants to serve Christ and His church, ordination will not be the primary issue relating to their service. That is, ordination in and of itself can neither enhance nor hinder a fruitful heart. Ordination might become a major issue for those who have ulterior concerns, such as a person deeply influenced by the feministic trends so prevalent in today's society. With this in mind, the following words of Beverly LaHaye will aptly serve as a concluding comment on this topic:

The ultimate goal of the total ministry of the church is to introduce people to Christ and to teach them the Word of God for their spiritual growth. This area of service is open to every Christian, male and female; in fact, we are all commanded to be witnesses of Christ.

If the desire of women who campaign for female ordination is to be able to win others to Christ and teach the Word, this is already commanded. A person does not need ordination papers to bring someone to Christ or to lead a Bible study. However, if the motivation is to attain leadership over a congregation, then it becomes a selfish desire for an elevated position. The Bible gives the man that responsibility in the church, as Christ's representative.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Barclay, 207-208.

⁴⁷ LaHaye, 215.

APPENDIX E
TRANSCRIPTS OF THE
INTERVIEWS WITH THEOLOGICAL PROFESSORS

Part A: Dr. William Bell, Jr. - Dallas Baptist University

Part B: Dr. L. Paige Patterson - Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

Part C: Dr. Elmer Towns - Liberty University

Part A: Dr. William Bell, Jr. - Dallas Baptist University

Dr. William Bell, Jr.
Dallas Baptist University

Introduction: *This interview was conducted with Dr. William E. Bell, Jr by the author on August 2, 1995, in Dallas Texas. Dr. Bell has several earned degrees, including an M.B.A. from Louisiana State University and a Ph.D. from New York University. He has been Dean of the Mary C. Crowley College of Christian Faith at Dallas Baptist University since 1984 and Professor of Biblical Studies at this same institution since 1967. He is a member and Resident Theologian at First Baptist Church, Euless, Texas.*

Payne: To begin, a survey I conducted showed that 36% of the respondents believed a deacon is to “oversee and administrate the direction, planning, and finances of the church.”

Dr. Bell: Well, as you know, the word deacon is the Greek word *diakonos*, and it means servant or minister. Servant is better for our use today because the term minister which at one time was a synonym for servant has now come to mean in ecclesiastical terminology a pastor or minister of the church. That is not the sense. So servant is the sense that the word conveys. There is absolutely nothing in the New Testament to indicate that the deacon was ever to have anything other than a servant capacity. There is no ruling function, no supervisory function, except in the sense of supervising a servant type ministry. But as far as administering the affairs of the church overall or having the overall authority in the church, that was not the function of deacons. Overseeing was the function of the pastors and/or elders and/or bishops, terms I believe to be synonymous.

I really think the source of the problem in our Baptist churches is that we, first of all, do not really understand the sense of elder and bishop. We just sort of swept that off to the Presbyterians and decided not to worry about it. Since we don't have elders and bishops, at least in a form of sense, I suppose it is natural that the deacons in affect have taken over the function of the elder or the bishop. As I frequently tell my students, the deacons in a Baptist church are really “el-deacs.” That is, they're about half elder and half deacon. They are not quite sure just where one stops and the other begins. Of course, the elders and/or bishops and/or pastors are supposed to have a supervisory capacity; they are to be the spiritual leaders of the church. So to the extent that deacons

in the Baptist church have moved into that vacuum, then it is natural that they have assumed some of this supervisory capacity. But, strictly speaking, that's unscriptural because in so doing they have abdicated the biblical role of deacon. It was never intended in the New Testament that the elder and deacon should be the same individual. They just don't serve the same function. So we have confused those two categories, and we thus have a group of men who are a little bit deacon and a little bit elder. It's no wonder then, that there is confusion, frustration, and controversy as to exactly what their function is.

Payne: I have had both a deacon and a pastor tell me that deacons should be recognized as elders. But, biblically we do not have that freedom.

Dr. Bell: Well, if we're going to do that, then let's change their names. Let's call them elders, and let them function as elders, and let them meet the qualifications of elders; one of which is they must have the spiritual gift of teaching. Maybe some of our deacons would have this gift, but a majority would not have.

Payne: The early church had about 20,000 members and only seven deacons. The average Baptist church has 100 or so active members, but 10 to 30 deacons. What is your reflection on this?

Dr. Bell: Let me read from a paper I prepared on deacons: "The deacon's existence and number are a function of *need* (*not* an honorary office). Note that the original Jerusalem church, which at this time consisted of many thousands of members, had only seven deacons. Sometimes today we think of the deacon office as being an honorary recognition of one's faithfulness in the church. It is not that at all. It is an office created in order to meet specific service related needs. Unless the needs exist, the office need not exist."

I've even heard people in Baptist churches speak of so-and-so as "making" deacon. They say, "He made deacon last year." Well that is very much like when I was in the army, and somebody made sergeant or made corporal. In other words, its sort of a badge of honor or a merit badge. I know many Baptist laymen who have been highly insulted because they never "made deacon." So, that again is a perversion. It is an honor to be a deacon, because the Bible says its an honor. It's an honorable office. But, it isn't something which is given to all worthy and mature Christians just in recognition of their service. We don't have honorary Sunday school teachers, janitors, or choir members. The point is, if the need exists then lets appoint some people to meet it; if the need doesn't exist, then we don't appoint them. I am thoroughly convinced that most Baptist churches have way too many deacons. That's the reason I am so frequently asked to come to a church and speak on what a deacon is supposed to do. Well, I'm glad to do that, but if they were doing what they were supposed to be doing, they wouldn't be asking the question. If they were meeting a felt need they wouldn't have to be scurrying around trying to figure out what exactly they are supposed to be doing.

Payne: So the ministry of a deacon is a ministry to people, not merely holding an office.

Dr. Bell: That's right. If deacons have a hard time figuring out what they're supposed to do, then it is very possible that there are too many deacons in that particular church.

Payne: So its an honor to be a deacon, not because of being placed in an office, but because of the service rendered through that office?

Dr. Bell: Yes. It's an honor that the congregation has felt that they are capable of serving in that capacity.

Payne: Do very many churches emphasize deacons taking care of the poor?

Dr. Bell: Not many, but some churches do practice that ministry. My church, for example, the First Baptist Church of Eules, does have a widow's list. As a matter of fact, each widow is assigned to a particular deacon who is to look after her needs--that's exactly what they ought to be doing. It is good that they're doing this at First Eules.

Payne: Should deacons understand the role of the New Testament pastor if they are going to properly function within the church?

Dr. Bell: Well, when speaking of a pastor, or an elder, or a bishop, a reference to the same office is being made, because I believe those three terms are used synonymously in the New Testament . . . The qualifications for pastors are given, of course, in 1 Timothy, chapter 3, and also in Titus. They are to be men--and incidentally, I don't think Scripture gives any encouragement whatever for there to be any women in either role, that is, serving as either a deacon or a pastor/elder. I don't really have any emotional feeling about that. I'm not a misogynist [a hater of women], I'm not a bigot, I just try to be a New Testament exegete. The simple fact is, I just cannot find any New Testament evidence whatever for women serving in either capacity. Both deacons and pastors are supposed to be, as the King James puts it, "the husbands of one wife," although I think the Greek text says "one-woman-kind-of-men." It's impossible for a woman to be a one-woman-kind-of-man, even by definition. Plus, in the case of deacons, the qualifications are given for their wives in 1 Timothy, chapter 3. There's no doubt in my mind that it is the wives, not women deacons, or it would be contradictory.

Additionally, I think the reason qualifications are given for deacons' wives, and not elders' wives, is because by the very nature of their role the deacon's wife may well be involved with him in the ministry. Now, she doesn't hold an official office, but if the deacon is dealing with people in the church, particularly women in the church, he will find that his wife needs to be involved also--if he is wise. Therefore, she has qualifications too, in order to support his ministry and even participate in it in a marital sense.

Payne: So, if the wives are going to be involved in the lives of the people--in visiting their homes and becoming involved in their problems--they need to be well qualified and able to maintain confidentiality. In the survey, only 5.4% of the churches would ordain a

woman to the diaconate, while 1.1% would ordain a woman to the pastorate.

Dr. Bell: I think as time goes on those numbers will probably increase because there's so much sociological pressure in our society right now. But I think you're right, it's probably pretty small still. One other thing is the question of Phoebe in Romans 16. It has been pointed out that because the masculine form is used there, rather than the feminine, that this infers an office rather than just a function. I do not think so. I grant you that the masculine form is a bit unusual there, but I do not think it is unusual enough to overturn the clear teaching of all these other passages. It doesn't carry that much weight. It is an obscure passage, so you can't let it override very, very plain passages of Scripture.

Payne: Is there any Scripture, apart from a few weak arguments concerning Romans 16:1 and 1 Timothy 3:11, that could be used in support of women's ordination?

Dr. Bell: No, and when you look at it historically, we now have what is euphemistically called feminist hermeneutics. That's an oxymoron. You can't have feminist hermeneutics, just like you can't have white hermeneutics, or black hermeneutics, or American hermeneutics, or English hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is a discipline in itself. You're trying to understand what the Scripture says. And it is very revealing I think, that virtually no one in the church ever considered having women as pastors or deacons until the rise of the modern feminist movement. So it's obviously not a function of exegesis, it's a function of sociological movements.

So deacons are to be men, men of absolutely unimpeachable morality and integrity. They are also to have certain gifts and certain aptitudes. As in the case mentioned earlier, the pastor is to have the gift of teaching, but that gift isn't required for the deacon. It isn't wrong for him to have it, but he doesn't have to have it. Deacons are to be doctrinally sound, holding the faith. He's to be grave, which I think means to be dignified. He's not to be double tongued, or, as we might say today, he's not to speak out of both sides of his mouth. He is not to be given to much wine, as King James has it. No doubt, some would comment on the fact that the deacons are not to be given to much wine, whereas the pastor is not to be given to wine. I don't think that is significant, I believe the qualifications are the same. In other words, they're not to have an alcohol problem. The pastor, nor the deacon, is to be a materialist. They are to be doctrinally sound.

Payne: Please respond to Wagner's statement in his book *Leading Your Church to Growth*: "The principle argument of this book is that if churches are going to maximize their growth potential, they need pastors who are strong leaders. Make no mistake about it, it is a rule."

Dr. Bell: . . . Well, I think as leaders, really in a way, the function is defined by the various terms. The term "elder" of course, literally means "aged one," "honored one," or "respected one." Therefore, they are to have a place of respect, honor, and so on, in the church. Bishop, *episkopos*, means "overseer" or "supervisor," so one of their functions is

to have the administrative and a spiritual oversight of the congregation. Then, pastor, of course, means “to shepherd,” and thus indicates they are to minister to the flock, much as a shepherd would to sheep. So, when you combine those three terms you have a pretty good summary of just what the man is supposed to do.

Payne: So, the terms describing the “pastor” indicate that he is to oversee in the church?

Dr. Bell: Oh, yes. Absolutely. However, we hear so much today about the “servant leader.” Let me say two or three things about that. Number one, I am not absolutely opposed to that terminology because there is a very real sense in which a pastor or elder is to be a servant. That is, in the sense that he is to try to serve the needs of the people, he needs to serve with humility, and so on. I understand all of that. But a couple of things that don’t seem to get emphasized very much is that, number one, the term servant-leader did not originate from the New Testament, or from Ecclesiastical circles. It originated from a professor at MIT, and was originally a business concept. Then the church sort of picked it up. Number two, although there is an element of truth in it, in the sense that Jesus washed the disciples feet, etc., the fact is, if you will scratch beneath the surface, you will find that many of the people who emphasize the servant-leadership concept are very, very opposed to the strong pastor concept. I have been to a number of conferences where this has been discussed and it is not a coincidence that the people who are pushing that concept are on the left wing of the theological spectrum.

Payne: I agree with you on both issues; we are to have a servant’s heart, but egalitarianism and the “servant-leader” model fall short of the biblical pattern.

Dr. Bell: Yes. We are to have a servant’s heart, and, there is a sense in which the leadership serves the flock. But, I’m afraid that is being overbalanced today. And, I think that it is being used, at least in our convention, as a so-called moderate ploy against the so-called mega churches, almost all of which are conservative.

Payne: Every God-given institution--the family, government, and the church--has to have a structure by which to function. However, servanthood has nothing to do with the structure itself, but with how those who are in authority should carry out their roles.

Dr. Bell: That’s right. It is true that Scripture says that we are not supposed to lord over the flock, but at the same time, it also says that we are responsible for their souls. It also says they are to be submissive to leadership, unless the leadership is completely off base.

Payne: That is, if there is a definite, specific biblical or moral problem.

Dr. Bell: Yes, in which case, there has to be a public demonstration of that, and under the proper circumstance.

Payne: 36% of the survey respondents believed deacons were to be accountable to their church but not their pastor. If Scripture designates pastor(s) as overseers of the church, shouldn't this also include the deacon ministry, especially since the elders appointed them?

Dr. Bell: As a matter of fact, when asked, "What is the function today of the deacon?" essentially what I say is that the deacon historically and currently should be available to the pastoral group to help them in any way they are asked to help. Originally their service was primarily in the area of helping the needy, the widows, and all that. But, it also includes whatever way they can serve and take some of the common, everyday, physical, material chores off the pastoral leadership. That's what there supposed to be doing. Obviously, they would have to be answerable to the pastoral staff because they are the ones they are trying to help . . . Instead of having retreats, trying to figure out what exactly they're supposed to do, what they really ought to do is ask the pastor, "How can we help?"

Payne: So, rather than showing up at a deacon's meeting to hold the pastor accountable, it would be more biblical, and helpful, to ask the pastor what ministry needs there are.

Dr. Bell: In a large church it isn't necessary for deacons to do some things because of having a staff. But, in a smaller church they ought to see things that need to be done. If necessary, they ought to bring the lawn mower down and cut the grass for the church, dust the pews, run off bulletins, or whatever. Whatever needs to be done that is not automatically being done by staff, the deacons ought to be the ones to do it.

Payne: It is easy for these roles to be reversed. For instance, they want their pastor to assume those functions and they want to be the overseers.

Dr. Bell: Yes, and I know pastors that do that. I know a lot of small churches where the pastors will do everyone of those things.

Payne: Yes; paint, fix the furnace, make all the visits--that is, anything and everything. I was confronted by the deacons of a church for not visiting the widows enough.

Dr. Bell: Well, that's right. And you know, if you read Acts 6 to them about taking care of the widows they probably would have gotten angry.

Payne: That was my response, and they did get angry. Well, anyway, lets consider one other related point. There appears to be a false dichotomy in our churches; many times we talk about the "spiritual" and the "temporal" aspects of church life, indicating that these two are mutually exclusive. This separation of function ultimately leads to the pastor doing "spiritual" things--preaching, visiting, etc.--while the deacons take care of the "temporal" things--controlling the finances, running the church, etc. Is this biblical?

Dr. Bell: No, as a matter of fact, when the church of Antioch sent the offering to

Jerusalem to help with the famine, the offering was delivered to the elders, to the apostles, not to the deacons. Now, the apostles may have filtered it down to the deacons, but they were responsible for it.

Payne: The deacons didn't show up and say, "We'll oversee the funds and you guys go visit the widows or something." The issue is not who's king of the mountain, but simply trying to implement basic biblical commands. When we neglect the New Testament structure, we can never hope to experience any type of peace, harmony, unity, or healthy spiritual growth. 43% of those surveyed said they had experienced a major fight between their pastor and deacons.

Dr. Bell: Well, I think it will continue to happen as long as we do not have a clear definition of who the deacon is.

Payne: 20% of the churches surveyed would ordain a divorced man as deacon, but only 5% would ordain him as pastor. What is your view on this topic?

Dr. Bell: Well, as I mentioned a moment ago in passing, I think this text is often misunderstood. The King James says that both the pastor and the deacon are to be the husband of one wife. If you take that as being the correct reading, then not only would that disqualify the divorced person, but it presumably would disqualify a bachelor, or could conceivably disqualify a widower. I know of instances where that has occurred. All that is most unfortunate because of what the Greek text says. As you probably know, the meaning of the statement is that the husband is to be "a one woman kind of man." The anarthrous construction there makes it very plain that he's talking about general moral integrity. He's not talking about the specific marital status. Paul himself would have been ineligible if it meant the husband of one wife, because he wasn't married.

So if that's the case, when it comes to divorce you have to look at what the New Testament says about divorce. I recognize that there is some disagreement here, but my understanding is that there are two biblical grounds for divorce. All divorce is a tragedy. But nonetheless there are two biblical grounds. One is immorality and the other is desertion. One comes out of Matthew the other comes out of 1 Corinthians 7. If that be correct, then a person who has been the innocent victim of a biblical divorce, and there is such a thing as a biblical divorce, then I do not believe it disqualifies him from being either a pastor or a deacon. On the other hand, if he has been divorced, and it is not a biblical divorce, then I think that disqualifies him from both.

The thing that boggles my mind, perhaps more than anything, is that most of our churches will not even ordain or appoint a man as a deacon or an elder even if his divorce occurred prior to his salvation. I'm thinking of one particular individual, who's a graduate of DBU and Southwestern Seminary. He was divorced when he was about 18 years old, after being married for only 6 months. He was saved at age 21, and subsequently entered the ministry. And, yet, he's had an awful time in his career being called to a church because he is divorced. This leads me to suggest a change. The Scripture says the blood

of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin. What we have made that mean is it cleanses of all sin --except divorce. I suppose this is a result of our tradition, or for some strange reason is a standard policy. Divorce has become the unpardonable sin for certain Baptists. What I am saying, is that we love to have people who have been on drugs, and we love to have people who have been grossly immoral, and have been armed robbers, and everything else, because once they get saved they make wonderful evangelists. I'm not saying that may not be true. But, if a person has been divorced, he's through.

Now there's another side to that coin. And this would apply to the church in general, not just the offices of the church. It's strange that on the one hand we are legalistic in this area with regard to the offices of the church, even way beyond what Scripture allows, and yet, when he comes to the general membership we're very lax. We can have people sitting out there in the pews who have swapped wives, or have lived with other people, and nobody blinks an eye. Church discipline is a lost art.

Payne: What is your advice to a young pastor who is considering his first church?

Dr. Bell: Well, the first and foremost thing I'd recommend is something they ought to do before they go. They ought to have a session with the deacons and go over some of these things that we are talking about. They should explain what the Bible teaches about these roles. They should make very clear that they are not coming in here as a dictator, that's not the point. They should explain they don't plan to come in here and tell everybody what he must do. But, at the same time, they need to understand that when he comes, he is not coming under the supervision of the deacon body. And, if any of them have trouble with that concept, then let's talk about it *now*, not six months from now after it comes down to controversy. That's the most important thing you could do.

Now, that won't guarantee that you won't have a problem. I would say that the best thing you can do is to teach expositively the word of God to the congregation. And, the congregation will either except it, or, they will reject it. If they reject it, there's not a whole lot you can do. But, a lot of congregations will except it, if it is done in a consistent, competent, and winsome manner. It should not be done in an agenda type manner. That's the beauty of expository preaching, you will eventually cover everything without having to pick out something. But, I think there ought to be some kind of a general understanding even before you go. The reason being that every church, well not every church, but a lot of churches, have the reputation of being run by ole Mr. So and So. Well, I think I would face it. I think I would go see Mr. So and So and maybe set down with him privately and say, "You know, you have a reputation of running this church. I'd like to know how you feel about that, and what relationship you and I might have if I should come here? This is not a matter of challenge. It's just that in my sense of what the New Testament teaches, no one person runs the church. Even I don't run the church as a ruler. And if I am going to be answerable to you or to any other individual in this church for everything I do, I probably won't come."

Payne: Americans like to have a say in things, which is good, but any organization must

have a certain amount of structure. In any organized group one or more persons are going to be in “charge;” someone has to “call the shots.”

Dr. Bell: Yes, and it’s not the deacons. I think that we need to be careful in our Baptist polity. We talk about a congregational form of government, and I guess it is, largely. But a true 100% congregational type of government would require the congregation to vote on every decision that is made. That isn’t what the New Testament foresaw either. In comparison, people refer to the United States, in a popular sense, as being a democracy. But, we’re not really a democracy, we’re a constitutional republic. And there’s a difference. We have democratic principles, but we elect people to office and then they lead us. Well, to some extent that’s what we have in the church. It’s congregational in the sense that the congregation chooses the leaders. But, then, once they’ve chosen them, those leaders are supposed to lead until they get so far out of line, or so unacceptable in some definitive way, that they just can’t occupy that position any longer.

Payne: The Bible gives a clear, biblical procedure for disciplining a pastor; it does not include organizing secret meetings, gossiping, or slander.

Dr. Bell: Well, it has to be done tactfully and winsomely. When a pastor gets up and says, “I believe that I’m in charge of this church, and I’m going to run this church,” and so on, he’s just asking for trouble. What he needs to do is just teach it as it stands in Scripture. And, I believe that in most instances, I would hope that in most instances, if it is taught from Scripture, if the people have any spiritual sensitivity at all, they will respond in a positive way. Now there’s some churches that don’t have very much spiritual sensitivity, and they won’t respond to it. I know some of them. Really, more than I’d like to admit. But hopefully, in many instances, you’d be able to spot them in advance and steer clear of them.

Payne: Dr. Bell, thank you for your time and your thoughtful insights.

Part B: Dr. L. Paige Patterson - Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

individual participants in the corporation.

Payne: You mentioned a “board” of deacons. Is that the most biblical term?

Dr. Patterson: No, the least Biblical in fact. It really was a colossal mistake. My preference of term is to simply refer to them as a diaconate.

Payne: The Jerusalem church had about 25,000 members, at least twelve apostles, but set aside only seven deacons; Baptist churches average 20.9 deacons and 2.4 pastors. Do we have the numbers turned around?

Dr. Patterson: I'm not sure that I would make as much of the numerical equivalency in Acts. My own perspective is that the early church in Acts is a church in transition. It's just beginning to develop it's legs, like a little colt that's getting up, beginning to walk around, and forming itself. I'm not sure how much we can draw from certain numerical situations. For example, were all of the twelve apostles even in Jerusalem much after Pentecost? We don't know, but sometime not too long after that, they were out all over the world. Many of them, apparently, did not even associate with Jerusalem at all.

What I would say, however, is that if indeed Acts provides us the paradigm and the rationale for the beginning of diaconate, which I think is probably a fair rendering of it, then it is easy enough to establish that what this amounted to was a benevolence committee. I do realize, however, that Acts 6 does not say specifically, as such, that these men were deacons. I also recognize that there are many other people who do not accept this passage as such, but see it otherwise. But if so, they were a committee assigned under the leadership and spiritual guidance of the church, for the purpose of seeing to the physical needs that people had in the church. This was done so the apostles could devote themselves to prayer and to study and not be sidetracked on things that were important, but not of maximum spiritual importance. So, in fact, it was a benevolence committee designed for the purpose of carrying out the physical ministries of the church. In doing this, they would liberate the apostles to deal with spiritual things which were for eternity. I don't see how anybody can get around that; it's as patently clear as it can be.

Payne: Have we produced a false dichotomy in the church by making an absolute distinction between the “business” and “spiritual” aspects of the church? That is, deacons sometimes see it as their job to “run” the business of the church while the pastor is expected to preach and visit hospitals. Does Acts 6 provide such a distinction?

Dr. Patterson: No, I don't think you can make such a broad distinction. Furthermore, I find no biblical evidence to show that the New Testament church was heavily involved in any kind of business. They did what was absolutely necessary. They were taking up a collection for poor saints in Jerusalem, which was your first instance of the Cooperative Program, as far as I know. Somebody had to be charged with taking care of the money, a treasurer in effect. Somebody would be responsible for getting it there. So there were

certain business items as such that were undoubtedly done. But, I have an idea that even those were far more informal than they were formal.

What may have happened in Baptist life was that we went to seed on concepts such as democracy, church autonomy, and the priesthood of the believer--all of which are concepts that are absolutely biblical. But, after all, a heresy has never been based on a totally erroneous doctrine--its always a doctrine that's true, but emphasized in such a way that it becomes distorted. I fear that what we have created in our Baptist churches is a fierce individualism that is so autonomous that it is autonomous from the Holy Spirit.

Payne: Many Baptist churches seemingly want the pastor to "lead the church" but want the deacons to "run the church." Is it possible to have such a dichotomy in function?

Dr. Patterson: To the extent that this dichotomy were to be functional in a church, I believe it would take a triple amount of God's grace to get anything done. I don't doubt that there have been moderately successful churches that have functioned that way; I don't doubt that some good things happen in a church of that kind. But, this system is by nature self defeating. It's like calling a CEO for the Chrysler Corporation and telling him, "Now you are going to lead, but the authority to run this organization resides in the stockholders." This would never work, even in the business world. The only thing the stockholders have anything to do with is selecting the CEO. Then, if they don't like what he is doing, they can certainly replace him. However, they don't run the business.

Payne: Do you believe the idea of a deacon-led church developed due to our history of having small churches with bi-vocational pastors who were absent during the week?

Dr. Patterson: I don't know that the phenomenon of the small church with the lay leader emerging is the culprit. I am convinced, however, that your conclusion about tradition is probably right. That is we, like anybody else, have developed Baptist traditions which need to be subjected to the spotlight of Holy Scripture. And we laugh at others about their traditions but develop our own. Those all need to be subjected to the scrutiny of the Word of God, and that on a regular basis, to be sure that what we're doing is not merely tradition bound. Actually, I think that the emerging of lay leadership in the church often times has been greatly used by God, as in the case of George Truett. Truett was enjoying being a school teacher when a deacon stood up and moved that he be called as pastor. He protested it but went home and prayed about it and came to a conclusion that was what he was supposed to do. So, I think you can have that type of thing happen. I do think tradition though, is an opponent.

Payne: Peter Wagner has stated the following in his book *Leading Your Church to Growth*:

The principal argument of this book is that if churches are going to maximize their growth potential they need pastors who are strong leaders

. . . make no mistake about it: it is a rule

. . . Many pastors learned from their seminary professors that they should not abuse their leadership positions in churches. They were taught to reject strong authoritative, directive pastoral leadership. A whole vocabulary has been developed to discredit pastors who have tended toward aggressive leadership. It is called 'dictatorial,' conjuring up images of Hitler or Idi Amin. It is said to be 'Jim Jones' type of leadership, so obnoxious to sensitive Christians. Some put it this way: 'Christianity needs no ayatollahs!' Pastors are warned against 'ego trips' and 'empire building.'

Do you believe it is possible for a church to function properly without understanding the New Testament role of a pastor? And, do you believe seminary training has led, at least in part, to a misunderstanding in this area?

Dr. Patterson: Yes, I do share Peter Wagner's perspective, at least on that. And yes, I do feel that theological seminaries, in an effort to cool down wild fire, often put out the whole fire. I do believe much of the blame lies in the seminaries and the instruction they have given. My own approach to this subject at Southeastern is to try to teach two things in balance, because both are very important. First of all, I think that the pastor must see himself as a servant. Secondly, his people must see him as an Israeli style officer who leads the assault; he is not alone, but nevertheless, pretty well guiding it.

The best way to come at this has always been to consider the three words that are used interchangeably in Scripture for the pastor. I think that is where your definition is given. *Presbuteros*, or elder, is primarily a term of respect. It doesn't have to do with his function, but with who he is by virtue of his office. *Poimen*, the word for shepherd, indicates that the good pastor basically will be engaged in three activities: He feeds the sheep, he protects the sheep from predators, disease, what have you, and he should preside over the birth of new lambs. If he doesn't he soon won't have a flock. It seems to me that in these terms you have exposition of the Word of God, indoctrination, and evangelism. The other term *episkopos*, undoubtedly refers to the obnoxious part of being a pastor, as far as most of us are concerned. We're happy enough to do the shepherding, but we don't really want to do the administration of the church. However, in fact, we are charged with it. *Episkopos*, as you know, means an overseer. So the very terms themselves help us enormously in defining the task. Now, we might be more cautious about these definitions if, when looking in the New Testament, we didn't have there the examples of pastors doing precisely what is reflected in the terms. But, when we look at the New Testament, we do have the examples, and this further sets the precedence, underscoring the meaning of the terms.

Payne: Your observations are interesting, especially when referring back to the survey I conducted. For instance, 45% of those surveyed did not believe the pastor was to be the primary overseer of the business and spiritual affairs in the local church. Likewise, many

pastors did not understand this truth. If almost one half of those in a given church do not recognize the leadership responsibilities of the pastor, then it is no wonder that 80% of SBC churches are stagnant or dying. Do you see a direct relationship between all of this?

Dr. Patterson: You picked my mind. I was just fixing to say, "This is why 80% of our churches are either static or declining." You cannot run an organization that way, it will not work. As a matter of fact, every rapidly growing congregation on the entire globe that I know anything about has a very strong, decisive, honored, pastoral leader.

Payne: That is, serving with a humble, servant's heart.

Dr. Patterson: Yes, having a servant's heart. Well, to be honest, some of them don't even have that. But, whether they do or they don't, there is no such thing as a rapidly growing congregation that is committee-led or deacon-led. There is an important point to be made right here. Is the lack of growth in such a church because the people on those committees or the people on that diaconate are incompetent? No, heavens no! There may be some of them that are ever so more competent than the pastor. But the fact is, a camel is still a horse put together by a committee. Committees always tend to unravel at the link of the least common denominator. Though committees have value, in the final analyses, whatever nature they are, you never get substantive leadership out of a committee.

Payne: The New Testament does not provide the example of a lay person, deacon or committee or otherwise, ever presenting any business to the church; direction for the church was always provided by the pastors. Hence, the New Testament example seems to present a pastor-led church in cooperation with the people, not a people-led church in cooperation with the pastor. Both models are within the parameters of the priesthood of the believer, etc., but the latter seems to lack the blessing of the New Testament. Further, what ever polity, I believe that the spiritual walk of the church is of the utmost importance. That is, it appears there were both spiritual laymen and spiritual pastors who led in those New Testament situations. A spiritual walk seems to produce harmony. Would you agree with that?

Dr. Patterson: Well, I think in the ideal situation it is. But, I'm not one to idealize the New Testament situation, certainly when taking a good look at the New Testament church at the end of the century. For instance, there's no better place to look than the seven churches of the Apocalypse. And, I think what you find in those seven churches is pretty well true of almost every age. So, when somebody tells me that five out of seven churches are a mess, then I say, "So, what's new?"

Payne: You're dealing with people aren't you?

Dr. Patterson: Yes. But I think that it only underscores the importance of your point. That is, why were the two churches that were not in a mess, not in a mess? They were

growing and prospering under saintly pastoral leadership. And so, whatever the conditions may have been in the New Testament from time to time, the ideal condition, as clearly presented in Scripture, is that which you have articulated.

Payne: The pastor-deacon relationship is also important, though no doubt largely misunderstood. For instance, 37% of the respondents believe deacons are not accountable to their pastor; 19% believe a primary job of deacons is to hold the pastor accountable; 43% had experienced a major pastor-deacon conflict in their church. Also, SBC literature often suggests that pastor(s) are not to supervise deacons and that deacons are not to supervise pastor(s). But, if the New Testament prescribes the function of overseeing to pastors, this would apparently include the diaconate; it certainly would prohibit deacons from supervising the pastoral staff. What are your observations? Does this surprise you?

Dr. Patterson: Well, no it doesn't. One of the things I've been saying to churches lately is, "If you really want to be what God wants you to be, you must divest yourself of the idea that this is your church." I really think the concept of "my church," regardless of whether it is held by the pastor or the members, is a concept that hurts the church. Many times the pastor says it until he comes to believe it. More often, however, it's the people that live in the community who embrace this mind set. They see the pastor as someone who is transitory, staying in the community only two to four years, and who doesn't plan to be there permanently. At least, they don't plan for him to be there permanently. Consequently, he's just passing through and has no authority--it's their church. In reality, however, it's God's church, if it's going to be a New Testament church. Therefore, whatever our traditions have been, they need to be very fiercely subjected to the scrutiny of the Word of the Lord.

Payne: Since pastors have been entrusted with overseeing, would this not also include supervising the diaconate? Doesn't the act of ordination in Acts 6 suggest accountability?

Dr. Patterson: Personally, I do not take the word "ordained" in that passage seriously. You may have seen my article in the book *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood* [Crossway Books, 1991], where I deal with the question of ordination. In that article, I essentially raise a big question as to whether ordination today has any remote connection with what happened in the New Testament. But, whether you take this action to be ordination, as such, or a simple appointment, which is what the word actually says, the end result is the same. This was an action taken, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, by the elders of the church--by the apostles. Obviously, if they appointed them, then they could un-appoint them if necessity called for it.

Payne: This is woefully neglected in most Baptist churches because they only allow the church to dismiss someone; this is a grave misconception with even graver consequences.

Dr. Patterson: I believe so, too. And, the way we have tried to address this problem is

to address it by not addressing it, but still wanting positive results. That is, we've tried the rotation system for deacons. We have neglected biblical church discipline.

Payne: Conceivable, a man could live by the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 without being converted or living a spiritual life. But, Acts 6 requires that a deacon be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, and that he be a soul winner. However, 18.4% of the Chairmen of Deacons stated they had never led a person to Christ; 26.3% said they were not involved in on-going ministry; 3% said they did not know if another religion would be sufficient for someone to be saved. Church members estimated that 55% of their deacons had never led anyone to Christ and that 58% were not involved in ministry to widows, etc. Should we place more emphasis on the spiritual nature of the office of deacon as found in Acts 6?

Dr. Patterson: First, let me say that I pray to God in heaven that your statistics are misleading, that your sample was somehow skewed. I pray it is wrong, but I strongly suspect that it's precisely accurate. Secondly, I don't know, concerning Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3, that I'd put it that way, that is, that Acts 6 should be given more attention than 1 Timothy 3. I'd probably say both/and. But, the point your making is extraordinarily well taken. The requirements of Acts 6 concerning the Spirit-filled life is definitely not possible unless there has been conversion and convergence with the Scriptures. So this is where you would have to start, and then move on to the other. It seems to me, then, if they flunk the first two tests, there's no use worrying about 1 Timothy.

Payne: 20% of the churches surveyed would ordain a divorced man to the diaconate, but only 4.9% of them would ordain a divorced man to the pastorate. Please respond.

Dr. Patterson: Well, I think it's one of those issues where we have not done a very good job in presenting the Scriptural view. I am, as probably everybody would expect me to be, straight and narrow on the subject. I do not think that a man that has been married a second time should be a deacon in the church, and, obviously, should not be a pastor. But, I think, first of all, that we've not been very good about saying why that might not be. Secondly, I think that when the church addresses and states such a position, that we need to offer a perspective that makes it clear that this in no way hinders a person from being greatly used of God. It merely states that as a part of the qualifications for this particular office that x, y, and z pertain. I think that we've got to make that very clear and that it was not our choice, but God's choice. Now, of course, as you know, Dr. Criswell disagrees with me here. He believes those passages mean just one wife at a time in a polygamous society. The most recent historical research shows, however, that Rome, while very promiscuous, was not given to polygamy. And so, it's not really possible to argue that a polygamous society produced a situation which prompted the Apostle Paul to give an admonition for having only one wife at a time. I think all the evidence really supports the idea that he could have been married only one time.

Payne: About 5.4% of the churches would ordain a woman to the diaconate, but only

1.1% would ordain a woman to the pastorate. What is your response to this?

Dr. Patterson: Well, this is an interesting question, of course. First of all, let me just say that even the moderates have not, in fact, taken women as pastors. Now, again, the question with me is not ordination. The question is, "May they serve in this capacity?" So, I move this issue out of the question of ordination, which I think is a totally different question. But, it's forever clear to me that the New Testament teaches that a woman may not serve as the pastor of a church. It's interesting to me that the honest liberals and moderates always admit that. They simply take the view that this is what Paul believed but that he was wrong. I have more respect for that view than I have for the view that tries to reinterpret the Scriptures with some sort of a revisionist technique. I have no respect for that at all. It is dishonest; essentially, it lacks integrity. So, it's clear enough that only men are to serve as pastors.

Now, the diaconate is a horse of a different color. I'll probably surprise everybody by what I say. If I were going back into the pastorate again, the first thing I'd do is find the fifteen most godly women in the church, who were really spiritual giants, and would look at their Bibles to see if they were very well worn and considerably marked. Then, I'd find out about their prayer time. If they qualified in all those ways, I would stand them up in front of the church and say, "Here are my deaconesses." I would make it clear, however, that they had no ruling function whatsoever and would not be in a teaching function over men, both which are strictly prohibited by the Scriptures. Then, I would say to the church, "If you are a woman and you have a problem of some kind that causes you to need counseling, don't see me, see one of these." Furthermore, they would be my women's baptismal committee. Therefore, they would be functioning in the truest sense of the word "deacon." And then, once I had them established as an example, I would find the fifteen godliest men in the church and do the same thing with them. I think it is in this second sense, by the way, that Phoebe is called a *diakonia*. Paul didn't mean anything official. The word has both its official and its generic meanings. Only the context of a particular statement can determine, if then, which the author meant. It is very clear to me that the mention of Phoebe is in a generic fashion, and, that's how I would use it too.

Payne: As we wrap this up, would you give me a concise definition of a deacon?

Dr. Patterson: A deacon is a special servant of the churches, appointed by the spiritual leadership of the church, the elders, to serve by meeting the physical needs of persons within the church and community, so as to enable the pastors to devote themselves to spiritual issues.

Payne: Is there anything that you would like to add before we end our discussion?

Dr. Patterson: No, I don't think so. I already told you more than I know.

Payne: Well I thank you very much. May God bless you.

Part C: Dr. Elmer Towns - Liberty University

Dr. Elmer Towns
Liberty University School of Theology

Introduction: *This interview was conducted with Dr. Elmer Towns, by the author, 25 July 1995, at Liberty University. Dr. Towns is Dean of the School of Religion at Liberty University and has previously served as Associate Professor of Christian Education at Midwest Bible College, St. Louis, Missouri and Professor of Christian Education at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois. He has written numerous articles and books, including The Ten Largest Sunday Schools (Baker, 1969, ten editions), and most recently, received the Gold Medallion Award for Book of the Year for his book, The Names of the Holy Spirit (Regal Books). Dr. Towns is founder of Church Growth Institute and Sunday School Heritage which have provided numerous church growth materials throughout a wide spectrum of the Christian church. Dr. Towns is a member of the Thomas Road Baptist Church, where he teaches a large, men's Sunday School class.*

Payne: To start with, let's discuss who a deacon is and how he is to function.

Dr. Towns: The word *diakonia* means servant. When you speak of the word servant, you are speaking about a group of men who serve the church. *Diakonia* is also one of the seven descriptive terms of pastor, and the pastor is to serve the church. The word is really used to denote what we might call the gift of helps. There are many forms of the root word *diakonia*. Therefore, I would say that you must, first of all, have the spiritual gift of helps in order to be a deacon. So the basis of your study has to determine, "What is the spiritual gift of helps?"

Well, someone who has the gift of helps, is a person who can do the same job repetitiously, meaning over and over again, to help people physically. Therefore, their physical help has spiritual ramifications. When we talk about the deacon ministry, the classic symbol is the deacon's offering to help people physically with rent, or food, or housing, or such as that. Therefore, when you think of the gift of helps, you are talking about helping the church. Now, in that sense, the gift of helps is given by the Holy Spirit, and, the Holy Spirit Himself is also spoken of as the *diakonia* to the church. Therefore, we assume that the Holy Spirit, with His power, works through deacons, who are

servants, and both serve the church.

Now, technically, we need to move beyond the generic use of the term to a more specific use of the term. The generic use is basically a servant or helper. But, in the Bible, the generic word later takes on a technical meaning. When you talk about a technical meaning, you're talking about a narrow definition. For instance, the word *ekklesia*, or church, means an assembly of people in its generic sense. However, it later became a technical word to identify His body, the church, the church of the assembly of baptized people. Similarly, we think that these people who are servants technically become a group of people who are called "the servants." Now it is not "a" servant, but "the" servant. That is, an article is used to designate a group of people who serve the church.

Now, there is a debate as to whether or not, in Acts 6, the "seven" were deacons. In this passage, the word *diakonia* is used to describe the service of these men, but not used as a designation for them. That is, there is a spirit of *diakonia* in their example of serving. Therefore, since that word is used to describe their service, I think it is an implication that these men are probably deacons in the church. Consequently, you can tie it together, not directly, but by correlation.

Payne: So you see Acts 6 as the initiation of New Testament deacons?

Dr. Towns: Yes. And, when you say "deacons," we do know that this word became a technical designation because of its use in 1 Timothy 3 where it says, "Likewise the deacons . . ." A. T. Robinson in his *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, states that the word "Likewise" implies "every criteria and qualification, passion and purity, of the pastor, meaning the bishop, must likewise be for the deacon." So, those deacons should be "likewise" and the only difference is calling. One is called full-time, to pastor; the second, deacons, are lay people who likewise are to be (1) blameless, (2) the husband of one wife, (3) grave, (4) not given to wine, (5) not greedy for money, (6) a good ruler of his house, (7) a proven ability as a servant, a *diakonos*, (8) not double tongued. So, what he spells out there is that when you speak of a *diakonos*, you're talking basically about a *servant*.

Now, the key meaning of the word, as I have stated in my book *Theology for Today*, where I discuss the etymology, that is, the original meaning of the word, is the "under rower" or "oarsman." This referred to someone who drew the oars on the bottom level of a two level Roman galleon. It's almost as though the top level is the pastor and the bottom level is the deacon. He takes the harder work, the lesser, the more diligent work, and that is the task that God has called him to do. Now, this is the background from which I am coming when I use the word "deacon."

Payne: That's a very good foundation on which to build. As you mentioned, the levels of service concerning the pastor and deacon are not indicating inferiority or superiority, but merely a distinction in God-given roles and function. No one has the right to "lord" over someone else, but there is a clear biblical definition of who is to be in charge of overseeing the everyday affairs of the church. However, it appears that in many churches, deacons have been more involved with overseeing than service. Do we have these roles reversed?

Dr. Towns: I hold in my hand a copy of a book I did on the ten largest Sunday schools. In this book, there is a statement by Dr. W. A. Criswell, pastor of the First Baptist Church, Dallas, on the role of deacons. Dr. Criswell says that the average Southern Baptist Church is more like a Presbyterian church. In a Presbyterian church, the board runs the church and the pastor just preaches. In a Southern Baptist Church the pastor is supposed to lead the church and the board is supposed to serve the church. However, in most Southern Baptist Churches the board, that is, the deacons, do not serve the church, they run the church, like in Presbyterian churches. Now, he comes back and says "As quickly as I say that, I want to say that this is not a statement to get at my deacons. Deacons at the First Baptist Church in Dallas are the finest, and we could not have built this great work if they had not assumed the role of New Testament deacons."

Payne: Peter Wagner has said, in his book *Leading Your Church to Growth*, that "The principal argument of this book is that if churches are going to maximize their growth potential they need pastors who are strong leaders . . . make no mistake about it: it is a rule." Having spent many years studying church growth, and being founder of Church Growth Institute, have you found this to be a true statement? Are growing churches the churches that allow their pastors to be a strong leaders?

Dr. Towns: Yes. I think a growing church has a pastor who will both lead and minister. I have said that it is important to have these two things together. Leadership builds a church, i.e., builds the organization, builds money, builds attendance, builds baptism, etc. Leadership grows these external things. However, in the second place, ministry builds the individual, ministry strengthens the faith, ministry strengthens the outlook, and therefore, the pastor needs both. Just as you need two wings to fly, two legs to walk, and two rails on which to run a train, so the pastor needs to both lead and minister. A church needs a man who is first of all a leader, externally, and then who is a minister, internally. One is organization, the other is organism. One has to do with the institution, the other has to do with the individual. You must have strong leadership or you can't build a great church. Therefore, you must have strong leadership that is supported by ministry, and strong ministry that must be supported by leadership.

Payne: Wagner also says that he feels many pastors have been taught by their seminary professors to not be strong leaders. He states that many people have called strong leadership "dictatorial" or "empire building," and that pastors who have been strong leaders are often accused of being "Jim Jones" or "Tdi Amin." I realize that pastoral authority has sometimes been abused, but it appears that in most American churches, and in many SBC churches, there has been a lack of respect for pastoral leadership.

Dr. Towns: That's right. I think there has not been a true respect for pastoral authority. There's an old adage in leadership: "People look up to leadership. Leadership looks down to ministry." The people are not altogether wrong. Some pastors have not led. They feel reluctant. Some pastors have led wrongly. They've done foolish things and

they've said foolish things. They've made career ending mistakes. And the people say that won't happen again. Some pastors, out of ignorance, haven't known they were the shepherd of the flock. They have thought, "I'm only the servant of the flock." Therefore, the ignorance becomes wrong expectations. They do not know how to answer the question, "What am I here to do?" They think, "I am just here to preach," or "I am just here to make hospital calls." They think they are to marry the young and bury the dead. They think that's it. They don't see their role as a shepherd. To be a shepherd means at least three things: (1) lead the flock, (2) feed the flock, and (3) tend or protect the flock.

Payne: In the survey I conducted, 22% of the pastors responding did not believe they were to be the primary leader in the spiritual and business matters of the church.

Dr. Towns: If they don't understand that, they are not going to take that role. Therefore, somebody has to lead, so the people step into that role. When people do that, it's not altogether their fault. If you have three or four young pastors come to a church, and they don't take the leadership, like having the vision, then the people learn that they have to take the lead after a while. Accordingly, their expectations are changed. Then, the people's expectations are projected on to the next young pastor. What happens, then, is he feels that he is not supposed to lead. The result is that he learns his role by the people's expectations. There is a reciprocity between people and pastor, between shepherd and sheep, between the leader and the led. You learn your role from the people, they learn from you. Therefore, expectations are important. So, how can you turn people around? You have to turn their expectations around. And, you turn around expectations by turning around their vision of what to expect in a church.

For instance, a Southern Baptist pastor in Memphis, Bobby Moore, I think is his name, went to Broadway Baptist Church. He had a church of about four hundred that he built up to about fourteen hundred. One of the first things he did was to take this book, when it first came out, about twenty plus years ago, and bought a hundred copies. He gave a copy to every deacon, and they went through and studied the great churches. In the process they dealt with two things: the role of the pastor and the role of the deacon. They did not necessarily look at it from a Biblical point of view, but from a pragmatic point of view. They were changing to a new paradigm and asking, "What must we do?" Then, they went from that point back to the Bible to ask, "What does the Bible say?"

After this, the pastor invited me down to preach my sermon on *The Ten Largest Sunday Schools*. They flew me to the church and I preached that sermon during their Training Union time. When I got there, they had all their deacons and their wives at the church. I preached that sermon, and, afterwards we went down stairs. He said, "Were going to have some Q & A with the people." When he mentioned questions and answers, I prepared a defense for myself. But, their Q & A was just on how they could reach more people for Christ. You could tell the deacons really had bought into a changing paradigm.

Payne: Do you think it is healthy for deacons to be well read in these areas?

Dr. Towns: Oh, absolutely; you have to, you just can't tell deacons to do it. You have to change people. You need to show them how other Baptist churches have done it; that's the first step. You must change their expectations. Then, you suggest, "Let's look at what the Bible says." Finally, to change, you bring in an outside authority. Therefore, the pastor is not just saying that this is his idea, and others don't see him as being a dictator. In other words, the pastor is saying, "I'm not asking the church to do what I want to do, the way I want to do it, when I want to do it." The pastor is asking the church to let him lead, and asking them to follow that leadership. He realizes that he must be Biblical, Great Commission oriented, soul-winning oriented, and holiness oriented. If he is, then he's asking the church to march together and they march together to build a great church.

Payne: What about the duties of a deacon?

Dr. Towns: There are four duties, I believe, of the deacon. First, deacons must take responsibility for the routine labors in the church. This includes such things as looking after the poor, the widows, material needs, and to look after the maintenance of the church building and the people. Second, they are supposed to work on relationships between leadership and the people, as the first deacons did. That is, smooth out relationships between the pastor and the people. Their number one job is to be a trouble shooter in the church, to go to anyone who is disgruntled. That was one of their main jobs in Acts 6. Third, they are to be spiritually mature. And, I believe that if God gives you maturity and gifts, He expects you to use those gifts. Therefore, they are to be ministers in the church, whether they are teachers, superintendents, or whatever. No one is to just sit on a board. It is quite clear, that if you are going to be a deacon, you are to have "deaconed," that is, you have actually ministered and been involved in some place of service. Fourth, is to counsel the pastor, to lend spiritual direction to the pastor. Any pastor that won't counsel with his deacons, and any deacon who won't work together with his pastor, is not carrying out Biblical duties. Deacon's meetings are not where you decide a vote; you are to counsel and talk about where the church is going, and to give counsel to people to make decisions. There is a fifth part. I think when there is no pastor available, the deacons are to step in to that role. I think that, in other words, a deacon must be ready to preach, lead singing, to pray, to marry, to do whatever needs to get done. In other words, to lead a soul to Christ or whatever. If deacons knew they had to do this, they would move much more rapidly to call a good preacher--one they wouldn't have to fire. Then, they wouldn't have to do all this work again. And therefore, they would move much more efficiently to get somebody in that role.

Payne: According to the survey, church members estimated that 43% of their deacons were not involved in any type of on-going ministry to people--the lost, the shut-ins, etc.

Dr. Towns: I have organized, I think, seventy-nine churches; seventy-eight Baptist, and one Bible church. But, when I go to organize a church for a young man, I do certain things. I say to the people, "I have organized you today, but we are going to make a vote,

and we are going to vote to have no deacons for one year.” Pete Wagner does the same thing in his book on church planting. He does it for a different reason than I do. He does it because he says it gives the pastor a chance to become the leader. Basically, in my book on getting a church started, I have a church constitution that puts the pastor in the leadership. So, I don't have to give him that one year of leadership to make him the leader, because my constitution calls for that. I do it because in a young church, I assume that there is no one qualified to serve as a deacon.

To support this, I give two Biblical reasons. The first one is, “lay hands suddenly upon no man.” Therefore, I say to the people, “Today we don't know your tract record of serving in other churches, therefore, let's don't ordain any deacons or appoint any deacons for one year. After one year, those who minister well, those who are serving well, can be considered as a deacon.” The number two reason that I do this is because Acts 6 was approximately one year from Acts 2. The church started in Acts 2, and they waited a year. If the early church waited a year, why can't we wait a year?

Then I offer a word of practical suggestion to the pastor. That is, when you need people who are like deacons, call the men of the church together. Instead of calling a deacons meeting, call a meeting of all the men. Then, at the end of the year, the men who have showed up and served faithfully become your nominating committee. Those who are serving, and serving effectively, can be nominated as deacons, because for one year they have served in this church. You know them; they have a track record.

Payne: I agree with your procedure, if a pastor has the freedom to make such a selection.

Dr. Towns: Now, speaking of selection, let me tell you how Thomas Road does it. We do it differently than anyone else. At Thomas Road, anyone can put in a nomination for anyone else to be a deacon. You can even nominate yourself. You just pick up a card and submit the nominee of your choice. The person must be a member of the church. Then, Dr. Falwell preaches on the standards of becoming a deacon.

Once a nominee is submitted, it goes to the deacons. The deacons pray over the list and disqualify anyone for not being faithful on Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, etc. Therefore, they eliminate anyone they know who would not meet the qualifications. For instance, in our church, to qualify, you cannot be divorced, you cannot be a drinker of strong drink, you must have a good reputation, and you must be actively involved in serving, etc. They want someone that is doing something in the church. Almost every deacon in our church, for instance, is an usher, plus other things. Anyway, after they have gone through and eliminated those who have eliminated themselves, they then go with a team for a visit and sit down and talk with the man.

So, the deacons themselves go and visit a prospective deacon, interview him, and ask him a series of questions. Then, they recommend to the church a list of nominees as possible candidates. When the church gets ready to vote, they are given a list of names. However, you do not vote for anyone--rather, you scratch off anyone you know not to be qualified. In other words, its negation. The deacons ask you to write down any reason you would have for negating this person. You do not have to sign your name, just state

why you feel this person does not fit the Biblical qualifications. Thus, if you have a reason, such as a man owing you a hundred dollars that he has never repaid, or whatever, you can state that. We want people who have a good reputation with the whole church. So, you don't vote for them, you vote against them.

One man in the church came to me and said, "My name was submitted and I didn't make deacon. I want to know why." So, I went to the chairman of deacons and said, "Why didn't he make it." The chairman said, "Because he comes to church Sunday morning, and that's all. He's never here on Wednesday night or Sunday night." So I went to the man and told him. He said, "Well, I'll start coming." And he did. He came for about four or five years. After that he inquired about being a deacon once again, stating that he had been here. Well, to make a bad story end, he went through a divorce, so that disqualified him. But, I thought to myself, you don't come to Sunday night and Wednesday night services just to become a deacon.

Payne: What about the pastor-deacon relationship? As you said a moment ago, a pastor should work with his deacons, and they should offer spiritual advice to each other. In the survey, however, about 37% of the respondents did not believe that deacons were to be accountable to their pastor. Also, much SBC literature has taught that pastors are not to supervise the deacons, and that deacons are not to supervise their pastor. This seems to leave a lot of questions about the role of the deacon and leadership is thrown up for grabs.

Dr. Towns: Going back to Acts 6, notice who is accountable in that passage. It says, "Look ye out among you seven men." See, the apostles said this, and I'm assuming the apostles here are serving in the role of pastor/overseer/bishop/elder. So, the apostles said, "Look ye out" seven men, and he gives the criteria, whom "we" may appoint. In other words, the pastors take nominations from the church, and the pastors appoint them to their duty. Whoever appoints you, makes you accountable. Not only that, but they ordained them. Now, the word ordain is referring to the laying on of hands; it is not just spiritual, but a physical laying on of the hands. In Independent Baptist circles, as you know, many of us do not ordain deacons, we vote deacons in. Most Southern Baptist churches ordain deacons. I think that either method is acceptable. I don't think they must be ordained, or that they must not be ordained; I can be as comfortable with one as the other. But, *who* lays hands on the head is the key issue.

Payne: Its a symbol of delegation?

Dr. Towns: Yes. It's the issue of who's putting the crown on the head, the Pope or Charlemagne? You remember the story. Therefore, it's the pastors who lay their hands on them, to show that the deacons are accountable to them. But, the people vote, to show that the deacons are accountable to the people. And, in one sense, we all are accountable to one another in the church.

Now, concerning the ordination of a deacon, the issue is, who is laying hands on whom? Obviously it's the pastor that lays the hands on the head. The word ordain means

to stretch forth the hand, whether to the head or the shoulder.

Payne: As Moses laid his hands upon Joshua as a symbol of delegating authority, in Acts 6 it was the elders, or apostles, who initiated both the process of setting aside the first deacons and ordaining them. Therefore, the pastor should be given these same privileges today. This process would help the spiritual nature of the church, which is a key issue.

Dr. Towns: I believe that's correct, though spiritual people do sometimes disagree--such as Barnabas and Paul, two spiritual giants. Sometimes it has to do with presuppositions.

Payne: Well, I have taken up a lot of your time. I wonder, as we wrap this up, is there anything you would like to discuss that we haven't covered?

Dr. Towns: Well, I think I would wrap it up by making two or three statements. First of all, I would say you can't build a church on deacons. You must have a pastor. But, you can't build a church without deacons. I believe to be a Biblical church, you must have a Biblical pastor. And, if the pastor is not Biblical, then the church is not Biblical. At a Biblical church, you must have Biblical deacons. The second thing I will say is that, "Like begets like." If you are really a Biblical pastor, young men are going to be called who will identify with you. And, if you are really a Biblical deacon, people will want to be a deacon. They will want this, not just for the office, but to serve God, because they see you serving. If you really do it well, people will want to be like you. They will want to do what you do, because they will see what you do for the whole body, and they will see the body growing. A third thing I would say, the Bible says "in honor preferring one another, serving one another." The pastor must serve the deacons, and, the deacons must serve the pastor. In Philippians 2, it says that no man ought to think more highly of himself than he ought to think, but to consider Jesus who gave up everything. It's tough to be a deacon.

By the way you are interviewing me on my forty-fifth birthday; I was born again forty-five years ago today. It was July 25, 1950, by a Southern Baptist pastor, in a Southern Baptist Church. He was a student at Southwestern Baptist Seminary and we were having a Holy Ghost revival when I got there.

But, then again, when does the Holy Spirit get poured out on a church? Some deacons will say, "I'm going to stick to my office." But, they must realize that unless there is unity, there's not going to be revival. There must be unity among the deacons themselves, and there must be unity with the pastor and with the people. Therefore, they need to submit themselves to God. Also, the pastor, if he is going to "lord it over" the deacons, or the church, there is not going to be unity. Consequently, there is not going to be revival. God said, "I will pull out my spirit upon all flesh." He will do it, but there are some conditions involved. We must meet His criteria. Therefore, I think there is to be a humility on the part of all of us. Too often, the pastor says, "My office," and the deacons say, "My office." Both sometimes forget the unity.

Payne: It is not an office to hold, but a ministry to perform--that goes for everyone.

Now, one more question as we wrap up. Do you see a difference of opinion between Independent Baptists and Southern Baptists on this issue?

Dr. Towns: I would say that Independent Baptists are closer to the Biblical model, because they really understand the leadership of the pastor. Southern Baptists, probably because of their age, having been around for 200 plus years, are more likely to violate the pattern. However, as quickly as I say that, and I don't want to say one thing without saying the other, when it comes to total church organization and involvement, Southern Baptists come closer to the New Testament model. An Independent Baptist tends to violate the New Testament model, because the pastor, in violation of Ephesians 4:11-12, does all the ministry and leadership himself. He does not delegate or encourage the spiritual giftedness of all of his people. Therefore, the body is not being framed or joined together so they can bring forth a great revival. So, I don't want to just kiss the one and slap the other. I want to say that both of them have a certain light for where they are coming from. But, I rather think, if you are talking about just organic structure, that Independents are a little closer. But, as soon as I say that, I'm thinking of an Independent Baptist Church, no, I am thinking of several Independent Baptist churches, where the pastor owns the property and has never had deacons. That's not Bible. See, that's not a Biblical church. Therefore, he may see a few people saved, and God may wink His eye at that local church, and may bless the man with the gift of evangelism, but, many people who get saved go some place else to grow in Christ.

Payne: Exactly, and I agree with your observation here. Well, I have taken too much of your time already, so I will finish by asking if there is anything you would like to add?

Dr. Towns: No, that pretty well covers it.

Payne: Well, thank you so much for your time and input.

APPENDIX F
A SURVEY OF DEACON MINISTRY
IN THE LOCAL SOUTHERN BAPTIST CHURCH

Part A: Results of Survey Based on the Answers of All Respondents

Part B: Results of Survey Based on the Answers of the Chairmen of Deacons

Part A: Results of Survey Based on the Answers of All Respondents

No.	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>A Survey of Deacon Ministry in the Local Southern Baptist Church</i> (Includes the Results of All Respondents)</p>
1.	How many ordained deacons does your church have? Average: 20.9
2.	How many ordained pastors serve on staff in your church? Average: 2.4 (Thus, there are approximately 9 deacons ordained to every 1 pastor ordained.)
3.	Does your church have a written "job description" outlining the duties of a deacon? Yes = 54.1% No = 40.9% Unsure = 5.0%
4.	Does your church practice a rotating system for deacons? Yes = 55.7% No = 43.2% Unsure = 1.1%
5.	Does your church have an "Honorary" or "Emeritus" deacon program? Yes = 27.7% No = 66.9% Unsure = 5.4%
6.	Who participates in the "laying on of hands" in your church's deacon ordination services? Pastors = 2.7% Pastors and Deacons = 86.5% Pastors, Deacons, and Congregation = 10.8%
7.	Is participation in the "laying on of hands" limited to those in your local church? Yes = 7.1% No = 89.7% Unsure = 3.3%
8.	Does your church ordain women for the office of deacon? Yes = 5.4% No = 94.6% Unsure = 0.0%
9.	Does your church ordain women for the office of pastor? Yes = 1.1% No = 97.3% Unsure = 1.6%
10.	Does your church ordain divorced persons for the office of deacon? Yes = 20.0% No = 76.8% Unsure = 3.2%

11.	Does your church ordain divorced persons for the office of pastor? Yes = 4.9% No = 85.8% Unsure = 9.3%
12.	Does your church have written procedures for revoking an ordination? Yes = 13.8% No = 70.7% Unsure = 15.5%
13.	Is there prerequisite training for those going to be ordained as deacons? Yes = 31.9% No = 62.7% Unsure = 5.4%
14.	Are on-going training sessions/seminars for deacons offered in your church? Yes = 36.8% No = 60.0% Unsure = 3.2%
15.	Are training programs available wherein deacons can earn a diploma/certificate? Yes = 20.7% No = 70.7% Unsure = 8.7%
16.	In your understanding, what is the meaning of the word "deacon" as used in the New Testament? Overseer = 4.2% Administrator = 3.2% Servant = 92.6% Other = 0.0%
17.	What is the standard designation used for the deacons in your church? Deacon Board = 17.4% Deacon Body = 39.7% Deacon Fellowship = 7.1% Deacon Ministry = 25.5% Other* = 10.3% *Designations used most often under "Other" were "Deacons" or "Deacon Council."
18.	In your understanding, what is the primary purpose of deacons in the local church? 5.7% = To oversee and administrate the direction, planning, and finances of the church; 62.5% = Involved in caring, serving, and showing mercy within and without the church; 30.1% = Both of the above; 1.7% = Other.
19.	Is the pastor the primary overseer of spiritual and business matters in the church?*((*This question asked only of Pastor and Chairman of Deacons.) Yes = 73.8% No = 22.3% Unsure = 3.9%

20.	<p>Does your church recognize the pastor as the primary overseer for it's spiritual and business matters?*</p> <p>(*This question asked only of Church Secretary, Sunday School Director, and WMU Director.)</p> <p>Yes = 70.0% No = 7.1% Divided Opinion = 22.5% Unsure = 1.3%</p>
21.	<p>Do you recognize the pastor as the primary overseer in your church?*</p> <p>(*This question asked only of Church Secretary, Sunday School Director, and WMU Director.)</p> <p>Yes = 91.3% No = 8.8% Unsure = 0.0%</p>
22.	<p>Does the Bible teach that the pastor is to be the primary overseer in the church?</p> <p>Yes = 81.8% No = 12.2% Unsure = 6.1%</p>
23.	<p>Who is primarily responsible for leading the local church in spiritual and business matters?</p> <p>Pastors & Deacons Are Equals In This Responsibility = 37.4%</p> <p>Deacons = 2.6% Pastors = 55.3% Other = 4.7%</p>
24.	<p>Who would a member need to talk to in order to see the church pursue a new ministry, remodel the kitchen, etc.?</p> <p>Deacon Chairman = 11.2% Pastor = 49.4% Deacon Board = 8.2%</p> <p>Another leader/group = 31.3%</p>
25.	<p>Have you ever witnessed a major conflict between the deacons and the pastor of a church over who is primarily responsible for spiritual and business matters in the church? Yes = 42.9% No = 56.0% Unsure = 1.1%</p>
26.	<p>Is it a primary job of the deacons to hold the pastor accountable?</p> <p>Yes = 18.9% No = 73.9% Unsure = 7.2%</p>
27.	<p>To whom are deacons to be accountable?</p> <p>Church = 36.2% Pastor = 4.3% Church and Pastor = 51.9% Other = 7.6%</p>

28.	Are the deacons responsible for setting the pastor's salary? Yes = 10.9% No = 85.3% Unsure = 3.8%
29.	Do the pastor and deacons in your church have a good working relationship? Yes = 92.9% No = 2.2% Unsure = 5.0%
30.	Do business matters of your church have to be approved by the deacons? Yes = 20.9% No = 75.8% Unsure = 3.3%
31.	Should it be a requirement that a deacon serve on each committee in the church? Yes = 10.6% No = 84.4% Unsure = 5.0%
32.	Do committees report to the deacons in your church? Yes = 14.3% No = 83.0% Unsure = 2.8%
33.	Who serves as moderator of business meetings? Pastor = 84.4% Deacon Chairman = 8.2% Deacon = 0.5% Member = 6.5%
34.	Does the deacon body present recommendations to your church? Yes = 87.4% No = 12.0% Unsure = 0.6%
35.	Have any of the deacons in your church been a source of strife, gossip, etc.? Yes = 31.9% No = 52.8% Unsure = 15.4%
36.	Do any of the deacons serving in your church live a questionable lifestyle? Yes = 8.8% No = 72.4% Unsure = 18.8%
37.	Do you feel the deacons in your church have a vision for growth and building? Yes = 76.5% No = 10.7% Unsure = 12.8%
38.	Do all of your deacons believe personal trust in Christ is the only way of salvation?*(*This question asked only of Pastor and Chairman of Deacons.) Yes = 92.0% No = 1.0% Unsure = 7.0%

39.	Do any of your deacons believe that all religions, if taken seriously, will be good enough for people to go to heaven when they die?*
	(*This question asked only of Pastor and Chairman of Deacons.)
	Yes = 1.0% No = 87.0% Unsure = 12.0%
40.	How many deacons in your church have led someone to faith in Jesus Christ? 45%
41.	Have you ever led someone to Christ through personal soul-winning?*
	(*This question asked only of Pastor and Chairman of Deacons.)
	Yes answers: Pastors = 95.0% Chairman of Deacons = 81.6%
42.	How many of your deacons are active weekly in ministering to the sick, shut-ins, widows, lost, etc.? 42%
43.	Are you active weekly in ministering to the sick, shut-ins, widows, lost, etc.?*
	(*This question asked only of Pastor and Chairman of Deacons.)
	Yes answers: Pastors = 96.4% Chairman of Deacons = 73.7%
44.	Are you satisfied with the deacon ministry in your church?
	Yes = 47.2% No = 52.8%
45.	Please indicate the status of your church:
	Growing = 59.6% Maintaining = 33.3% Declining = 6.6% Other = 0.6%
#	These percentages are based on the answers of 186 respondents.

Part B: Results of Survey Based on the Answers of the Chairmen of Deacons

No.	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>A Survey of Deacon Ministry in the Local Southern Baptist Church</i> (Includes the Results of the Chairmen of Deacons Only)</p>
1.	How many ordained deacons does your church have? Average: 20.9
2.	How many ordained pastors serve on staff in your church? Average: 2.4 (Thus, there are approximately 9 deacons ordained to every 1 pastor ordained.)
3.	Does your church have a written "job description" outlining the duties of a deacon? Yes = 61.0% No = 39.0% Unsure = 0%
4.	Does your church practice a rotating system for deacons? Yes = 68.3% No = 31.7% Unsure = 0%
5.	Does your church have an "Honorary" or "Emeritus" deacon program? Yes = 46.3% No = 53.7% Unsure = 0%
6.	Who participates in the "laying on of hands" in your church's deacon ordination services? Pastors = 2.4% Pastors and Deacons = 87.8% Pastors, Deacons, and Congregation = 9.8%
7.	Is participation in the "laying on of hands" limited to those in your local church? Yes = 5.0% No = 95.0% Unsure = 0%
8.	Does your church ordain women for the office of deacon? Yes = 7.3% No = 92.7% Unsure = 0.0%
9.	Does your church ordain women for the office of pastor? Yes = 0% No = 97.6% Unsure = 2.4%
10.	Does your church ordain divorced persons for the office of deacon? Yes = 14.6% No = 85.4% Unsure = 0%

11.	Does your church ordain divorced persons for the office of pastor? Yes = 0% No = 95.1% Unsure = 4.9%
12.	Does your church have written procedures for revoking an ordination? Yes = 4.9% No = 78.1% Unsure = 17.0%
13.	Is there prerequisite training for those going to be ordained as deacons? Yes = 31.7% No = 65.9% Unsure = 2.4%
14.	Are on-going training sessions/seminars for deacons offered in your church? Yes = 48.9% No = 51.2% Unsure = 0%
15.	Are training programs available wherein deacons can earn a diploma/certificate? Yes = 26.8% No = 63.4% Unsure = 9.8%
16.	In your understanding, what is the meaning of the word "deacon" as used in the New Testament? Overseer = 2.4% Administrator = 2.4% Servant = 95.1% Other = 0.0%
17.	What is the standard designation used for the deacons in your church? Deacon Board = 9.5% Deacon Body = 47.6% Deacon Fellowship = 0% Deacon Ministry = 38.1% Other* = 4.8% *Designations used most often under "Other" were "Deacons" or "Deacon Council."
18.	In your understanding, what is the primary purpose of deacons in the local church? 0% = To oversee and administrate the direction, planning, and finances of the church; 57.5% = Involved in caring, serving, and showing mercy within and without the church; 42.5% = Both of the above; 0% = Other
19.	Is the pastor the primary overseer of spiritual and business matters in the church?*((*This question was asked only of Pastors and Chairmen of Deacons.) Yes = 66.6% No = 33.3% Unsure = 0%

20.	<p>Does your church recognize the pastor as the primary overseer for it's spiritual and business matters?*</p> <p>(*This question was asked only of Church Secretaries, Sunday School Directors, and WMU Directors. Therefore, no answer was available from the Chairmen of Deacons.)</p>
21.	<p>Do you recognize the pastor as the primary overseer in your church?*</p> <p>(*This question was asked only of Church Secretaries, Sunday School Directors, and WMU Directors. Therefore, no answer was available from the Chairmen of Deacons.)</p>
22.	<p>Does the Bible teach that the pastor is to be the primary overseer in the church? Yes = 80.0% No = 15.0% Unsure = 5.0%</p>
23.	<p>Who is primarily responsible for leading the local church in spiritual and business matters?</p> <p>Pastors & Deacons Are Equals In This Responsibility = 38.1% Deacons = 4.8% Pastors = 50.0% Other = 7.1%</p>
24.	<p>Who would a member need to talk to in order to see the church pursue a new ministry, remodel the kitchen, etc.?</p> <p>Deacon Chairman = 9.3% Pastor = 44.4% Deacon Board = 13.0% Another leader/group = 33.3%</p>
25.	<p>Have you ever witnessed a major conflict between the deacons and the pastor of a church over who is primarily responsible for spiritual and business matters in the church? Yes = 66.6% No = 33.3% Unsure = 0%</p>
26.	<p>Is it a primary job of the deacons to hold the pastor accountable? Yes = 17.5% No = 80.0% Unsure = 2.5%</p>
27.	<p>To whom are deacons to be accountable? Church = 46.3% Pastor = 4.9% Church and Pastor = 36.6% Other = 12.2%</p>

28.	Are the deacons responsible for setting the pastor's salary? Yes = 5.0% No = 95.0% Unsure = 0%
29.	Do the pastor and deacons in your church have a good working relationship? Yes = 92.5% No = 2.5% Unsure = 5.0%
30.	Do business matters of your church have to be approved by the deacons? Yes = 15.0% No = 82.5% Unsure = 2.5%
31.	Should it be a requirement that a deacon serve on each committee in the church? Yes = 15.0% No = 85.0% Unsure = 0%
32.	Do committees report to the deacons in your church? Yes = 17.5% No = 80.0% Unsure = 2.5%
33.	Who serves as moderator of business meetings? Pastor = 82.5% Deacon Chairman = 7.5% Deacon = 2.5% Member = 7.5%
34.	Does the deacon body present recommendations to your church? Yes = 90.0% No = 10.0% Unsure = 0%
35.	Have any of the deacons in your church been a source of strife, gossip, etc.? Yes = 38.5% No = 43.6% Unsure = 17.9%
36.	Do any of the deacons serving in your church live a questionable lifestyle? Yes = 10.3% No = 74.4% Unsure = 15.4%
37.	Do you feel the deacons in your church have a vision for growth and building? Yes = 77.5% No = 10.0% Unsure = 12.5%
38.	Do all of your deacons believe personal trust in Christ is the only way of salvation?*(*This question was asked only of Pastors and Chairmen of Deacons.) Yes = 100.0% No = 0% Unsure = 0%

39.	<p>Do any of your deacons believe that all religions, if taken seriously, will be good enough for people to go to heaven when they die?*</p> <p>(*This question was asked only of Pastors and Chairmen of Deacons.)</p> <p>Yes = 0% No = 97.4% Unsure = 2.6%</p>
40.	<p>How many deacons in your church have led someone to faith in Jesus Christ?</p> <p>Answer: Not enough respondents answered to formulate a valid percentage.</p>
41.	<p>Have you ever led someone to Christ through personal soul-winning?*</p> <p>(*This question was asked only of Pastors and Chairmen of Deacons.)</p> <p>Chairmen of Deacons = Yes: 81.6% No: 18.4%</p>
42.	<p>How many of your deacons are active weekly in ministering to the sick, shut-ins, widows, lost, etc.?</p> <p>Answer: Not enough respondents answered to formulate a valid percentage.</p>
43.	<p>Are you active weekly in ministering to the sick, shut-ins, widows, lost, etc.?*</p> <p>(*This question was asked only of Pastors and Chairmen of Deacons.)</p> <p>Chairmen of Deacons = Yes: 73.7% No: 26.3%</p>
44.	<p>Are you satisfied with the deacon ministry in your church?</p> <p>Yes = 47.5% No = 52.5%</p>
45.	<p>Please indicate the status of your church:</p> <p>Growing = 56.4% Maintaining = 38.5% Declining = 5.1% Other = 0%</p>
#	<p>This survey is based on the answers of 41 deacons who responded.</p>

APPENDIX G
TRANSCRIPTS OF THE
INTERVIEWS WITH ROLE MODEL CHURCHES

Part A: First Baptist Church, Brownsville, Texas

Number 1: Pastor Kenny Lewis

Number 2: Chairman of Deacons, Jim Steenland

Part B: First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Georgia

Number 1: Associate Pastor, Ken Smith

Number 2: Chairman of Deacons, Rhon Redwine

Part C: First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida

Number 1: Pastor Homer G. Lindsay, Jr.

Number 2: Chairman of Deacons, Edmund "Bud" Whittaker

Part A: First Baptist Church, Brownsville, Texas

Number 1: Pastor Kenny Lewis

Number 2: Chairman of Deacons, Jim Steenland

Number 1: Pastor Kenny Lewis

Pastor Kenny Lewis
First Baptist Church, Brownsville, Texas

Introduction: *This interview was conducted with Pastor Kenny Lewis of First Baptist Church, Brownsville, Texas. He has been at the church for fourteen years, during which time the church has made significant progress in the kingdom's work. The church has gone from being a million dollars in debt to having an annual budget of approximately one million dollars (\$500,000 for the church and \$500,000 for their Christian school). They have started a number of missions across the border in Mexico, founded a self-supporting orphanage, and have an extensive radio ministry. This interview was conducted September 20, 1995, over the telephone and was tape recorded.*

Payne: Your church has spent a lot of time in prayer. Was this prayer time regarding the selection of deacons?

Lewis: We have a prayer ministry called Warriors on the Wall and the goal is to have a warrior for every hour of the week. We only have 70-80 but we'd like to be at 100 by the end of year. Each person has an assigned hour based on a day of the week; this covers the entire ministry. I believe much of what's happening is a direct result of pushing the enemy and his influence back through prayer. So that ministry is much more broad than just deacon selection. It has an area of ministry here assigned per day and so according to the day in which they pray, that's their highlight. They can call up the prayer line and get updated requests. I think that's part of the real fuel providing the impetus for what's happening.

Payne: Your church has spent many hours trying to determine who should serve as a deacon.

Lewis: Yes. We have a deacon nominating committee that I appoint. That committee will easily spend 100 or more hours in interviewing, praying for, and praying with prospective deacons. They use the qualifications found in 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1, and Gene Getz's book *The Measure of a Man* which develops those same qualities. We really look for their character and devotional walk and try to determine their practice regarding a quiet time and sharing their faith. We want to know whether their families are in agreement. A third major area is how do they relate to the pastor. Are they willing to follow his leadership? How will they relate to the deacon body? We want to know if they understand this is not a

controversial role, but one of support, service, and help. We want to know if they are willing to serve and fit in. If not, they are not selected.

Payne: So you do discuss those areas thoroughly with them?

Lewis: The deacon nominating committee does. Should they find agreement and willingness to serve, then the candidate writes a five to ten page single spaced doctrinal paper describing their beliefs. Then the candidate goes before an ordination council. He gives each member of the council a copy of that paper so they can review his beliefs, a description of his prayer life, etc. to help determine who they are. Once that person passes through the ordination council, his name is submitted to the nominating committee. They will bring their report to the church which constitutes a nomination. Other nominations may be made from the floor, although people are strongly encouraged to work through the deacon nominating committee. Nominations can be made only at that time. The actual election follows two weeks later.

Payne: In what particular areas do your deacons serve?

Lewis: Once elected, a man will begin to attend our deacon's meetings. In our meetings, we spend about half our time in prayer and reciting Scriptures--every meeting is that way. Each person is free to share his prayer requests. After we go around the table taking prayer requests, we divide up into groups of two or three and quote that Scripture and pray for the needs of the person in front of us for the second time. We've actually had to limit the Scripture quoting to just six verses.

In practical matters, the deacons also serve as trustees. They also have the opportunity to look over the budget. Practically, we might ask them specific questions or about general policies. But, the day-to-day operation of the church is carried out by paid staff because the ministry is now so large, spending about \$1500 per day, it cannot be done on a volunteer basis.

Payne: Do the deacons control the finances of the church?

Lewis: No, not at all. As a practical matter, it would be impossible anyway. With \$1500 per day being spent, one can see that a skilled position is required and that it takes many hours of work. Plus, ministry decisions are the responsibility of the pastors. God has assigned that weight of oversight, according to 1 Timothy 3, to the overseers. This is also seen in Acts where the church had a conflict. The apostles had them choose out men whom they, the apostles, could put in charge of the task at hand. There was a direct link of accountability.

Payne: So the pastoral staff carries out the financial administration of the church?

Lewis: In reality, all the financial decisions are carried out by staff, but if we have questions about a certain situation, or if the decision is relating to us, we generally ask the deacons for help. If there is not agreement among staff and deacons, then we don't continue.

Payne: What are some of the ministries of the church?

Lewis: We have three distinct ministries that operate under the umbrella of this local church. One is the school which has a budget of \$600,000. The church is close, with about the same amount. We have a school that was founded in 1955 and has 340 students. This has been a great ministry. It runs preK to 8th grade.

Then there is the missions program under Bob Plemons which kicked off in 1967 after Hurricane Bula. When Bula did so much damage it allowed the church to step in and respond with acts of kindness and out of that at least 12 missions and mission churches have been started in Mexico across the river. Many of those missions now have children and grandchildren missions providing numerous preaching points. They are self-supporting and self-governing and have been a tremendous thing that God has used--they are an ongoing work. The church has also founded an orphanage in Mexico which is now self-supporting and has its own governing board. It is part of the Valley Baptist Academy, a child care agency. We also have a child care facility with Buckner Baptist Benevolence called The Haven. These are tremendous missions ministries under Bob Plemons and by God's grace they are going on and multiplying. Also, by God's grace, several mission churches were started on the U.S. side, not just on the Mexican side.

The third ministry which is much smaller and much less visible is the radio ministry. It's about 13 years old and broadcasts throughout the Rio Grande valley and in Corpus Christie. God has used it also.

Payne: Is that the church services, basically?

Lewis: The sermons are edited and sent to the station. We probably have about 20,000 listeners, so they say. That's just a neat ministry, coming from the poorest city of the United States. God has just done it--it's not something we've sought or thought would be a great idea. It just happened. Probably a unique facet of this church was that they wanted a teaching pastor and that was a primary area of concern in their search. When I talked with them, I told them it was going to require my being unavailable every morning and some afternoons to study and pray. The amazing thing is that after being here 14 years, they've never backed off that commitment. I do not, on the whole, visit in the hospitals or routinely in people's homes. I do take care of the crisis needs, but my role as a teaching pastor, is to equip them for the work of ministry. We have a chaplaincy corp and they have the gift of mercy and they visit in hospitals.

Payne: Do the deacons help with that?

Lewis: The chaplaincy corp is primarily from the membership, because our philosophy has shifted a little from serving by position to serving by gift. We're looking for people who have the gift of mercy and who are uniquely equipped by the Lord to serve in that way. That's not my spiritual gifting--therefore I do not fill the normal, traditional role of the pastor. I am very much involved in Evangelism Explosion and other equipping-type ministries where I can

equip them. Pardon the analogy, but they are the stars and I am the coach. At the same time, my particular gifting is as a teaching pastor. So I spend much of my time studying and preparing, getting ready to teach. The church has been very supportive.

But, this same desire to have a teaching pastor has also characterized the deacon ministry. They decided that they want to be governed by the Scriptures. With that commitment, it was determined that our deacons would be servants. They're not supervisors --they are my support, they are my closest friends, I thank God for them, they pray for me, we weep together, and I receive God's direction from them. Accordingly, our deacons do not assume a role of antagonism, but one of support and direction--I consider myself one of the most fortunate pastors in the world.

Payne: Did the deacons accept this new role of a teaching pastor when you arrived 14 years ago or did you have to work through a transition?

Lewis: Initially they did not. Some conflicts did exist. We tried to be easy and gracious according to 1 Peter 5, however, and just continued to teach the Scriptures. I came to them and told them if what I teach is wrong I want to know it. I want God's best. The Scriptures were repeatedly upheld and it did accomplish its purpose. So with time, those who could not see or understand from Scripture the deacon's servant role no longer served. That has proven to be both good for them and for the church. The deacon's meetings now are marked by a real sense of encouragement and spiritual uplifting as opposed to attacks and something that had to be recovered from; the deacons' meetings are not something the pastor should have to recover from. Thank God, those days in the past were few and far between. I think the change has occurred through, one, their desire to be taught and led by Scripture and, two, a deacon nominating committee which insisted on biblical guidelines. If they did not sense this was God's person, they did not nominate them. With the three-year rotation, in time those who were either unwilling or unable to serve no longer served.

Payne: So you feel that a major strength is built into your selection process because of the emphasis on prayer and the truths of Scriptures?

Lewis: Absolutely. Those things are crucial. I met with a member of that committee last week and expressed my appreciation and love for him. Much of what God has done in our church has come as a direct result of his insistence on following the Scriptures in that nominating process--no matter how rich and powerful a person, they would not be nominated if they were not willing to serve and did not meet the guidelines . . . That committee has withstood opposition from time to time. They have held their ground and been faithful.

Payne: Do you understand Acts 6 to be a reference to the origin of the deacon ministry?

Lewis: Yes

Payne: Do you feel we neglect the spiritual qualifications given in Acts 6 in deacon selection?

Lewis: It is absolutely deadly to place an unqualified man in a place of leadership. It will kill a church. It is an ongoing, continuing everyday battle. Any church or pastor or leadership that feels like "now they've got it" is just dead meat. It doesn't work that way. A church must constantly insist on the biblical guidelines. A deacon must be full and yielded to the Holy Spirit. If not, he's not qualified. We look for easy, practical evidence (such as Scripture memory, a daily quiet time, sharing the faith) as well as the obvious (are they involved in the church and serving right now). Electing a person often does not change them, it often kills them--so they're looking at a person's life right now. So it is a struggle, where our committee spends at least 100 hours together every year. If a church isn't willing to bring up men of integrity, endurance, wisdom, and faithfulness, then they will never have the leadership that I believe God really desires.

Payne: Even though close measures are taken, there's always the possibility that a person will change in the middle of the road. What are the procedures if a man is not working out?

Lewis: We have had maybe one or two who became disqualified during their active service. Each voluntarily resigned by taking themselves out of that active leadership role realizing they could no longer fulfill it. It's been fortunate that every person ordained here, either as a deacon or a pastor, has been asked what he would do if a time came in his life when he were no longer willing or able to meet these qualifications. Each is asked publicly prior to receiving this document of ordination if he vows to return it if he disqualifies himself. We're trying to say this is a life-time deal unless you become unwilling or unable.

Payne: What types of ministries are the deacons involved in consistently?

Lewis: They really serve by person rather than by position. They do not have separate areas of ministry that are assigned to them. They do help in some of the more traditional areas of responsibility like the Lord's Supper.

Payne: Regarding deacon meetings, do you meet on a regular basis?

Lewis: We meet on Sunday evenings after church once per month. The men take responsibility for providing a light meal.

Payne: What do you do at the meetings besides praying, Scripture sharing, and the meal?

Lewis: The pastor prepares an agenda which we follow. Some common items include approval of the agenda, minutes, financial reports. A typical order would deal with old business, new business, other items. Some deacons may report on an assignment that they have been following. If we have an elderly single lady whose roof needs fixing, we would expect a report of what had happened in this regard. We might discuss our family style Lord's Supper, where three times per year we actually have a meal. We have 320 people coming to eat on a close schedule and this requires a lot of organization. The deacons are taking more

and more responsibility in these respects. They've been doing a super job. So we will review items like this and make recommendations for ways to improve ministry, etc.

On some items, we want and need the deacon's authorization. If it's clear in the budget, then no action is required, it's just administrative; if it's not clear, we do ask their counsel. We are very comfortable with that. They are a great group for providing counsel . . . By constitution they do review the budget, but we have a finance committee that oversees the budget process. It is really the staff that provides the day-to-day checks because we're the ones who are knowledgeable of the church's business. Our deacons do not even want to be responsible for financial matters in the church. There are other men who are gifted and enjoy doing it. The deacon body does look at the budget and if they have questions they'll ask, which is good and right. But, as far as that being a time-consuming agenda item it is not. It is a monthly agenda item and they do look at it but it's more out of concern to see how we are doing financially. We are the poorest city in the United States, so they do want to know how we are doing financially.

Payne: What size town is your church located in?

Lewis: Brownsville now has probably 145,000 people.

Payne: What are your average attendance numbers?

Lewis: We run about 480 in Sunday School. We'll have about twice that number in worship.

Payne: What training are deacons required to have?

Lewis: We don't have a formal training program. Their screening is such that we are looking for progress in a person's life--where they are in their Christian life and in which direction they are looking. Because they do not assume automatically by position any specific area of ministry, we do not have a formal training program. Our objective is to see that each of us is rightly connected to the living Christ. We feel that if we are, He will provide us organic, living direction. That is our number one objective. We are not heavy programmatically; we try to be heavy organically.

Payne: Is there an emphasis placed on men being soul-winners during the selection process?

Lewis: Yes, although, we are consciously moving away from the term soul-winner to the term disciple-maker. We are trying to emphasize that our goal is not to make a decision but to make a disciple.

Payne: As Pastor, what goals do you have for your deacon ministry?

Lewis: I have wondered if there should not be specific assignments, responsibilities that would always be under their area of ministry--maybe that will be true in the future. As

pastors, we are going through a transition from doer to developer. We are in the process of relinquishing ministries and equipping, encouraging, and training members to assume these ministries. These ministries are to be the church's and we are to be the teachers. It's awkward answering these questions because I assume maybe we've come to a certain state but we are very much still in process. We have not arrived. I'm somewhat uneasy about any brochure that says, "come and we'll tell you how to get it all together."

Payne: Do you have any further comments or any closing remarks?

Lewis: When I recently went through one of the darkest moments of my life, it was my deacon friends who were there. They cried with me, prayed with me, and provided God's direction, giving words from Him to me--I count them my dearest friends. And, my counsel and plea to every pastor would be to give himself to prayer and to the ministry of the Word and to insist on Scripture being the absolute authority--if he does this, it will work. It will provide the pastor with more peace and real growth than he can imagine. If he will just be honest and open, and admit where he is failing and hurting, and if he will really major on developing men, really concentrate on discipling them, he will receive more benefit, encouragement and strength than in any other thing he does.

Number 2: Chairman of Deacons, Jim Steenland

**Jim Steenland, Chairman of Deacons
First Baptist Church, Brownsville, Texas**

Introduction: *This interview was conducted with Jim Steenland, Chairman of Deacons, First Baptist Church, Brownsville, Texas, by the author, 11 March 1996, tape recorded telephone conversation. FBC Brownsville is a growing church in the southern tip of Texas. The town of Brownsville is rated the poorest per capita in the nation, but God has blessed the church to retire its debt and consistently operate in the black. They have helped start eleven mission churches, nine across the border in Mexico. Their total budget is about \$1,000,000 and provides the resources for a growing church and Christian school. The church--through the dedicated efforts of their pastors, deacons, and members--is reaching the town of Brownsville for Christ.*

Payne: When and how did you become a Christian?

Steenland: Well, I grew up on the mission field in Paraguay where my father was a Plymouth Brethren missionary. When I was about six years old all I understood was that I was a sinner and sinners went to hell, but that somehow Jesus had died so I could go to heaven. Well, I didn't want to go to hell, I wanted to go to heaven. But I never really understood the concept of salvation, so when I went and prayed nothing really happened. From there, I went on through life very, very frustrated realizing that something should be different. I think I was about fourteen when I promised the Lord I would pray and read my Bible every day, and I did that faithfully as I could until I was twenty-one or two. However, I still knew something was wrong in my life. Later I was married, joined the Baptist church, and became active in church life. I also received my draft notice and was stationed in Iceland with the Air Force.

While in Iceland, I went on vacation to Conway, Arkansas, where my wife and I had lived before joining the military. During this time, I was still bothered about my spiritual life so I went and talked to my pastor at the Baptist church we had previously joined. We had a nice time sharing, but did not get to the place where I could inquire about what was wrong with my Christian life. As I was leaving his office, I asked my pastor what I could do to grow in my Christian life. He recommended any book by Andrew Murray. I bought several of Murray's books, but the one I really read was *Holy In Christ*.

When I returned to Iceland, I was reading this book on my day off. It was about two o'clock in the morning, and I came across the phrase by Murray that pointed out that Jesus Christ did not come to give us a free trip to heaven, but He came to make us holy. That hit me like a ton of bricks. It had never entered my mind that Jesus Christ had come to make me holy. I had always understood that He came to forgive me and that since I was forgiven I would go to heaven. Therefore, it was no more to me than having a free ride. It never dawned on me that I had a responsibility to respond to God for what He had done. It was not a works thing, it was just that I came to realize that God sent His Son to take away my sins and His goal for me was to be holy like His Son. This truth hit me like a ton of bricks. I burst out in tears, fell down on my knees, and prayed "Oh God! forgive me, I never understood that Jesus died to make me holy." Then, what I had always wanted--that new life, that new beginning, "if any man be in Christ he is a new creation, old things are passed away, behold, all things have become new"--that took place. I remember picking up my Bible the next day and it was like someone had turned on a light --I understood it, it was neat, it was sweet, I wanted to read it. I had been reading it for seven years as I had promised God I would do, but now it was something I wanted to do rather than something I had to do. It was wonderful; it was like a real message that God had given, it was God's word to me! It was alive!

Since then things have not always been that ecstatic. There are still times when I read my Bible because I know I need to. But since then I have always known that there is a relationship there--I belong to God. That was in 1976, twenty years ago, and my life has never been the same since. Now, I go back to that time in my life--that is the point at which I really became a new creation in God. And I have seen God work in my life time and again. He has kept me from doing things I thought I wanted to do but in the end would not have been good. Sometimes He will just block something; and every time I've been able to look back and say, "Thank you, Lord. That would have been a mess."

Payne: There's nothing like knowing that you've been born again.

Steenland: That's for sure. And that's the reason I am specific in counseling someone who has come forward. If they tell me they have accepted Christ, I want to know the particulars of what happened. I have counseled some people who were like I was--they had all the right answers, but they really had not had that personal experience. And many of them have not been able to really point to a time when they know that all things became new. So I've been able to pray with them, and they finally admit that they had been missing something. So it has been great to share with others, to be able to help people in the same position I was in, who thought they had done it but had missed that relationship with Jesus the whole time. They had walked through the whole process, they were able to say all the right things, but they had missed Jesus all the time.

Payne: It is evident that you are saved and growing in your relationship with Christ.

Steenland: That's right. I became totally committed to Jesus Christ in 1976 and have

been growing ever since. The Bible came alive and I just enjoy reading it. You may think your mature, but you realize what a babe in Christ you are when you start trying to memorize scripture and when you come up against spiritual opposition. We went from Iceland to Okinawa, where I met the regional director of the Navigators, Mal Duke, who is now serving in Russia. The Navigators are real heavy into Scripture memory and discipleship. I had some really nice Christian guys who took me under their wings and started to help me grow and we also have been involved in church. It has just been a growing process. However, I see so many persons who are not growing in the Lord.

Payne: Do you feel that discipleship of persons is a down fall in our churches today?

Steenland: Yes. That is what Jesus commanded us to do--make disciples. Many people think the discipling process stops once someone has been led to the Lord. However, this is not true. The spiritual life should be compared to the physical life--parenting does not stop at birth, it only begins at birth. We must be active in helping young Christians to grow. I think about my own life and how continued discipleship could have helped. Had someone stepped in and taught me when I prayed that prayer at six years old, then maybe I could have come to a clear understanding of salvation much sooner. The way it happened, I could have died at any time during those years I thought I was saved and I would have spent eternity in hell. And I see so many Christians, so many people in church, who are not growing. And I think what God has laid on my heart, just as a layperson, is to come along side those people and help them grow, help disciple them. Therefore, I believe discipleship should be taken seriously.

Some churches, however, especially First Baptist, Brownsville, are very oriented toward this growth. Our pastor has made the statement that the church's spiritual depth will be determined by the spiritual depth of the men of the church. God has laid it upon the men of this world to be the leaders of their homes, to be responsible for raising their children in the fear of the Lord, and to be discipling their wives. If the home isn't being disciplined, the man, even if he tries, is not going to be effective in the church because God has given him, first of all, this great responsibility in the home.

Payne: Do you see discipleship at home as a qualification of a deacon?

Steenland: Absolutely. He's got to manage his home; if he can't manage in the home how can he manage in the church. If he can't serve his wife and children, how can he serve the pastor and the pastoral staff. If he does disciple and serve at home, he can also serve at church.

For example, as the pastors would come to me and ask where I really would like to teach, I felt great freedom in leaving that decision up to them. I told the Minister of Education that I would pray that God would give him wisdom in where to put me and I promised to tell them where I'm not comfortable teaching. I'm not comfortable teaching college-age and under simply because I was raised outside the U.S. and I don't relate well to the specific peer pressures, school structures, etc. As a result, I know I'm not qualified

for that area. Anything else, though, from young couples on up is fine. So I agreed that I would serve wherever God led him to put me. I found great relief in telling the pastors, "I'll serve you wherever God lays it on your heart to put me." My responsibility is to serve the pastors, to be a servant to them, not to tell them what I want. Part of my serving them is to pray for them and hold them up in prayer, that God would give them supernatural wisdom in the decisions He's called them to make. And I found great release--it was more than just release--it was actual joy that I found in serving them in that way.

Payne: So you voluntarily and willingly chose to have a submissive spirit?

Steenland: Yes, and I saw God bless it . . .

Payne: Have there been other times in your life when discipleship has been important?

Steenland: Yes. Most recently here at First Baptist Brownsville. When they asked me to serve as a deacon, I was hesitant. I had previously served at another church and I did not enjoy the pressures of that position. I had served with 120 other deacons and it was easy to fall through the cracks, which I did. I did not realize when a man went on to become a deacon that the more visibility a person has, the more Satan comes after them. I had always considered my home and my marriage to be one of those areas that was beyond Satan's reach. I have since learned that there is no such place. But, in my previous deacon position, only a month or so after ordination, Satan came after my home and family with everything! It was no longer just the small words that hurt, but it was raised, angry voices and going to bed angry; life was horrible. This type of thing had never occurred in our family. I didn't understand that it was Satan's attacks.

When a couple of the deacons at First, Brownsville, came to me and asked me to serve here I agreed, but only with the understanding that when I come back to them and asked that they would pray for me. I told them I didn't look forward to Satan's attacks again and I knew they would come. They agreed to do this. After accepting, I guess one of the first things Brother Kenny started with was challenging us to memorize Romans 6. That was the first deacon's meeting we had. I started trying to learn the chapter and others. He also started discipleship groups--he worked with a couple of the pastors, and then each pastor got two other guys, and so on. This grew to include many men--probably 80 men are through the program by now. It's still going and growing.

Eventually, I was ready to work with my own group. One deacon, during this time of discipleship, while studying *Evangelism Explosion*, came to the conviction that he was not a Christian and was saved. We grew together and discussed many of the common problems that the Christian faces every day. My men learned that they are just men--they will come face to face with evil and impure thoughts every day, but God has given us strength to overcome these problems. There is no spiritual echelon where one arrives and is raised above life's problems. Discipling men in our church is a joyous experience. It forms friendships where I can call these men and say I'm having a hard time--would you

pray with me. It is a very valuable tool in trying to overcome Satanic attacks.

Payne: What other resources have been used in this discipleship process?

Steenland: Pastor Kenny has used several discipleship programs and picked pieces to use from several others. He used Robert Coleman's *Master Plan of Evangelism* as one resource. Basically, the accountability he has built into our program has made the difference--the holding of people and friendships in Christ together has been the success of the program. Things like moral purity, obeying the promptings of the Holy Spirit, witnessing, daily prayer and Bible study were areas where we held each other accountable on a weekly basis. I haven't picked that up in other programs.

Payne: How often did you meet with your discipleship partners?

Steenland: Once per week--we might talk at other times throughout the week. I would have preferred meeting more often, but personal pressures prevented this. However, in some of the other groups, it was not uncommon to hear of teams going fishing, etc., or anything that would foster and build Christian comradery.

Payne: Do you feel that the deacon ministry has had a positive impact on the church?

Steenland: Absolutely positive. As a deacon body we knew that we could call on each other. I know that those men will be there for me--they would go out of their way to help me through a problem or a trial. After the discipleship training, we recognized a bond that had formed among us. Even now, when we start our deacon's meetings, there is a time of sharing. We go around the table sharing prayer requests. We speak about the Scripture memorization we're currently working on. Then we break into small groups and share these Scriptures and pray for each other in the small group. Many times, that small group time becomes a totally confidential time when we can open up and share our heart to each other. Many times someone else in the group will have had the same problem or trial, and if so, he will share how he dealt with the problem--we can feel strength from our brother as we experience the trial. We pray over our problems--if a brother is hurting we might gather around him and just pour our prayers over him. We weep together and pray for each other. The whole schedule of the deacon's meeting gets pushed aside because we need, at this very time, to minister to one of our brothers. Nothing else is as important as this spiritual need. We can't let a schedule supersede or take priority over ministering to one another. I think Jesus took the same approach--he didn't get so caught up in a schedule that he wouldn't stop to look someone in the face and say to them, "your faith has made you whole." Repeatedly, He did this. He handled the most urgent situation first and then went on--this is our model. Jesus took time for people--that's what our deacons must learn to do. Until we demonstrate Christ and make Him come alive to people, we can't offer them anything; in other words, He must be alive in us before we can share Him with others. We must make Christ real to people.

Payne: Are there other things about the deacon ministry you would like to share?

Steenland: In the book of James it says, "if any of you suffer, let him call for the elders and let them come and pray over him." We would sometimes approach a situation from this perspective and would see a real miracle. I can remember in a couple of these instances when we were praying that I felt God was going to answer the prayer--I could just feel God's Spirit. On other occasions, I have felt just the opposite. At these times I would just pray that God would have glory in the situation. I didn't understand, but I knew God would be exalted and glorified regardless of the outcome. Even though I sometimes felt awkward, I did feel that I'd been obedient to God when we prayed over these situations.

There's tremendous power in prayer when men come together for the purpose of seeking God's will--they don't seek anything for themselves, they come to serve the body of Christ in obedience to His Word. When deacons come together to pray for a sick person, because that person has called for them to pray, great things happen. God works! The same God that worked miracles in the New Testament can still work them today--though He may choose not to. I'm not a faith healer by any stretch of the imagination (laugh). It all boils down to the Father's will and that's what we must pray for. Anyway, I consider this a very special and very meaningful ministry that the deacons have.

Another time we had joy in prayer was when Jerry Jackson was chairman of deacons. Bro. Kenny was counseling a lady who totally lost control--he later said he had never seen anyone so uncontrollable--she was screaming and wailing and crying. So Jerry and I were in the office right next to Pastor Kenny's, and we got on our knees and just started pleading with God to remove the Satanic oppression and bring peace into that poor lady's heart. Bro. Kenny told us later that as soon as we started praying, she started calming down. There is tremendous power in prayer--where two or three are gathered in His name, Jesus is in the midst of them. It was truly wonderful sharing these times of prayer with my Christian brothers.

Payne: How long have you served as a deacon at Brownsville?

Steenland: From September 1992 until I rotated off in September 1995. I served as chairman for one year. Jerry Jackson was chairman; I was vice-chairman. He left after one year and I assumed the chairman's position by default. At FBC, deacons serve on a rotating basis--three years on and at least one year off.

Payne: Is there anything else you would like to share?

Steenland: No, I think that's all.

Payne: Well, may God bless you. It has been a real joy to talk with you.

Part B: First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Georgia

Number 1: Associate Pastor, Ken Smith

Number 2: Chairman of Deacons, Rhon Redwine

Number 1: Associate Pastor, Ken Smith

Associate Pastor, Ken Smith
First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Georgia

Introduction: *This interview was conducted with pastor Smith by the author on 25 September 1995, in Woodstock, Georgia. Pastor Smith has been on staff at Woodstock for eight years, but was a member and deacon at FBC prior to being saved. He is responsible for Pastoral Care at the church. Woodstock has had over 4,000 additions in the past several years, almost half of which have been conversions. The interview was tape recorded.*

Payne: You've been here for eight years, is that correct?

Smith: Yes

Payne: Were you a member here before Brother Johnny Hunt came on as pastor?

Smith: Yes, a lost member. I was saved in 1988 and God called me to preach. I started preaching part time in May of 1988 and then left my job at General Motors after 19 years on January 1, 1989. I've been here ever since.

Payne: Please give me a brief overview of your church's growth.

Smith: In 1986, we averaged 257 in Sunday School. We will average about 2900 in Sunday School this year. We average 3700 in worship and we're working to tie that number in to draw it closer together. We're a young church of about 35 years. We have all types of members ranging from blue collar to professionals. The neat thing, however, is that everyone is comfortable. The common laborer feels at home sitting beside the doctor. We have the spirit of Jesus among us. Our worship services are exciting and we have a great choir of about 200 members.

Payne: Since being on staff at FBC Woodstock, you've been responsible for working with the deacons and with the development of the deacon ministry, right?

Smith: Yes. I was a deacon in the group that set up the deacon ministry we have today.

Payne: So you served as a deacon before being called to preach?

Smith: Yes.

Payne: What are the strongest points of your deacon's ministry?

Smith: I believe their vision for service would be the strongest. They have three areas of service: Care, Share, and Prayer. Each deacon serves in at least one of these divisions. In the Care Ministry, the deacons work closely with the Pastoral Care ministry because we oversee all the funds designated to help in this area. Therefore, the pastoral staff utilizes the deacons in service on a regular basis in this regard.

Relating to the Share Ministry, every deacon is required to complete CWT. They agree to this within the first 52 weeks they serve. However, if a man does not already know how to lead someone to Christ, he is not going to be brought on to start with. In 1987 we agreed that every deacon should be certified in CWT. It's good discipleship and a good tool to memorize scripture. Another thing it does is encourages them to be consistent soul-winners. If they're not leading, the rest of the congregation will not follow.

The Prayer Ministry includes the deacons organizing a prayer meeting on Sunday mornings and a prayer chain for the church. Also, the deacon of the week is honored by opening worship services in prayer, just after the introductory song. Besides the Lord's Supper, the opening prayer is the primary time that the deacons are placed in the limelight.

Payne: So your church feels that the office of deacon is not a position to be held but a ministry to be performed?

Smith: Right, the deacon is to be a servant. What happened, in 1987 the deacons (about 28 men) were drawn together for a retreat on a Friday night. We listed everything we were presently doing, and then compared these responsibilities to what the Scriptures had to say about being a deacon. We went over the passages in Timothy and began to lay out just what a deacon is to do. We then went over the passage in Acts and saw what the deacons did there. The Pastor basically stood up and said, now what do you want your deacon ministry to be. So the deacons actually gave the input and set it up as it is today. Up until that time, we had been deacon-run but at this meeting we decided we wanted to take a biblical approach. Every man had input and the ministry we have today came from that meeting: (1) We decided the ministry and mission of deacons was to be servants, (2) We set up the qualifications, and (3) We determined the deacon nomination process, the questionnaire, and the procedures for handling qualified and non-qualified candidates. After setting the vision for ministry, we came back and followed through with it.

Payne: You stated that prior to Pastor Johnny Hunt coming here the church was basically deacon-run. How did it go when the biblical model was implemented?

Smith: Right, the church was deacon-run. Since the change, some of the men are still here--

some are not. Some of them did not like the new ministry; many had enjoyed exercising authority, but left after we geared the ministry toward service.

When this change came about, the deacons were moved more to the forefront. Everyone is important and everyone must be serving. If members, including deacons, do not have important tasks, they feel they have no ownership and the church will lose members. So everyone has a place to serve at Woodstock, and the deacon ministry is one area of ministry that is elevated.

As mentioned earlier, we instituted deacon prayer every Sunday morning. Likewise, through the Care Ministry, we set in place an after-hour ministry where deacons are the first ministers to be called in case of an emergency. That is, if there is an emergency or a hospital visit to be made after church office hours, the deacons make it. We have 11 pastors so there is no way can we handle all the needs of the congregation 365 days per year. The deacons become an extension of the Pastoral Ministry department regarding hospital visits and other care-taking situations. If the deacon feels he cannot handle the after-hour need, then a pastor is on call who walks along side the deacon to minister in the situation.

Payne: I assume that it is important for everyone to have a servant's attitude, is that correct?

Smith: Yes, all the way down. Members will never rise above their leadership, so servanthood is very important. Another thing servanthood did for us is raise the level of commitment. For instance, in most cities, it is good to join a Baptist church and become a deacon if you are a businessman. At Woodstock, however, very few businessmen would ever make it because they would not be willing to give the time required. It's not just a title--it's a title that demands service and we follow through very meticulously. On average, only 12 of 15 men who are selected to the office will complete the full three years of service because of the tremendous requirements.

Also, we try to maintain discipline to ensure servanthood. Though all the deacons are selected by the church, the deacon body retains the right to very quietly discipline itself. The reason for this is that we can discipline in the right way. We are a church that is very different. At least once in the nine years that Johnny has been here, we purged a member and turned him out just like the Bible says. Similarly, if there's an area where a deacon begins to falter, he is approached by the men themselves instead of the matter being brought before the church. This is done in hopes of helping that brother through loving restoration.

Payne: So you also feel the selection process is important?

Smith: It is extremely important. Incidentally, we do have men who fill out the questionnaire who do not qualify. Therefore, the denial process is also very important. I've served on both sides of that.

Payne: Regarding the selection process and the questionnaire, how do you handle that?

Smith: When a questionnaire is filled out, it goes to the Pastor. The Pastor then assigns a

number to each form. The only person who knows who the questionnaire belongs to is the Pastor. Then it's carried to the nominating committee within the deacons. They go through the process and if a person shows evidence that he's not a mature Christian, he's disqualified.

Payne: Would this candidate be dismissed at that time?

Smith: Yes. Those who make it through the questionnaire process are brought in for an interview. If they make it through the interview, then they're brought before the church, voted on, and if they receive 75 percent of the vote they are elected to serve for three years.

Payne: What are some of the qualifications you search for as you elect deacons?

Smith: We take the biblical qualifications--someone who is the husband of one wife, the head of his household, treats his family well, etc., as our qualifications. We also look for men who are a vital part of church ministry, such as the Sunday School, before they are considered as a deacon. The questionnaire and interview process point out other areas of service within the church. The process is carried out by men who themselves have been through the process and understand it's worth. Also, the nominations are first presented to our Pastor so he may remove a person at the onset if he knows of something in his life that would disqualify him. Those who make it through the process are known in the church because of their service. We might not know their names, but we recognize them because they're here; they're here every time the doors are open. That's what we look for. We ask for three good years and they we give them one year off. One note of interest, if a candidate is a Mason, he is not brought on as a deacon.

Payne: What is the reasoning behind not allowing Masons to serve?

Smith: We feel that it is a secret organization and we don't need to be a part of it as Christians. There's only One Potentate and He is Jesus Christ.

Payne: Will your church consider a man who has been divorced for the position of deacon?

Smith: Our position is that if a man has been divorced, he is not qualified to serve as a deacon. If his wife has been divorced, he is also disqualified. These men are often proven faithful, but we cannot bring them on as deacons. We do, however, use them in other positions such as trustee, for example. We honor what the Bible says although it sometimes hurts. Many divorced men have come to the church and God has changed their lives--He got hold of them. Thus, they spend their lives serving Him, but they are not qualified to be a deacon. Because we're such a fast growing church, we can't keep enough deacons. Therefore, we involve some of the men who are disqualified for deacon positions in various areas of ministry. We use every resource we have.

Payne: How many deacons do you have at this time?

Smith: I think we have about 45.

Payne: So you have about 45 deacons, but run 2900 in Sunday School and 3700 in worship?

Smith: Yes. We have trouble having enough deacons because of the tremendous work load.

Payne: With the need for more deacons, how do you feel about lowering the scriptural standards in order to meet the need?

Smith: We are not willing to reduce those qualifications for any reason.

Payne: How often does the deacon body meet?

Smith: Once each month. The meetings consist of handling the business of bringing new deacons on, teaching them how to handle their responsibilities, and carrying out the Care, Share, and Prayer ministries. Since they also help with our alter counseling, they conduct alter counseling training at these meetings. Another program called the Hospital Shepherd is now being implemented. The deacons are trained on how to visit in hospitals--how to present themselves in the room, how to gather family information about the person before going in, etc. Our emphasis for these visits is to witness to these people. We wrote our own outline for this program and the deacons work in this area. We have done two training sessions each year to promote this program. The deacons do not discuss or vote on any overall church business or issues--these matters do not pertain to their area of ministry.

Another key they have been able to correct themselves within those areas where one or two might want to be high-minded and take control. In one instance not long ago, a new deacon suggested that the deacon body tell the Pastor that something needed to be done. He was immediately confronted by the other deacons and reminded that it is not the place of deacons to be directing the Pastor to do anything concerning church business. His attitude changed after that. So the deacons handle any problems themselves so that the Pastor does not need to intervene. The Pastor does not attend these meetings because he is so busy with other matters. Because of this policy, the deacon ministry is handled mostly by the deacons. The deacons are responsible for maintaining a servant's spirit and keeping their integrity.

Payne: So the deacons in your church are not the type of men who would promote a rebellious spirit, etc?

Smith: No. If this happened, the other deacons would take care of this. The chairman of deacons would take another deacon with him and they would go to see this man. They would sit down and talk to resolve the situation. If this occurred, all the leadership of the church would pray for the situation.

Payne: When the change in the deacon's function occurred in your church, you mentioned that some men didn't like the change. How was that handled?

Smith: When they completed their three year service and rolled off, they stayed off.

Payne: Does it take some time for new members to become oriented because of the pastor-led church versus the deacon-led church?

Smith: No. Usually, potential members are visited and questions of this nature are handled one-on-one. As a matter of fact, it is well liked and most people appreciate the positive attitude of our church.

Payne: You are primarily responsible for Pastoral Care, is that correct?

Smith: Yes. I handle pastoral care, benevolence, hospital visits, bereavement, etc. and I work closely with deacons to accomplish each of these.

Payne: Do you feel that any of the pastors at Woodstock who need help in their particular area of service would feel comfortable asking the deacons to help?

Smith: Yes. The deacons are considered front-line servants. If we need a teacher, for example, many of them are ready to go at any minute. When we conduct a widow/widower day, the deacons serve tables--literally. It's a wonderful time for them.

Payne: Do any of the deacons train laypersons in the church to minister in those areas directly assigned to you?

Smith: No, I do that. Before a deacon or other helper is turned loose, he is required to make two visits at the hospitals with me personally. Once he does that, he is qualified and is equipped with a parking pass, a name tag, and is free to call the church to get information about every patient at a particular hospital (such as room numbers) to make his job easier.

Payne: The job description of deacon is not particularly detailed in the New Testament, but someone has suggested that it's hard to give a job description for a servant's role. Do you feel that your deacons are willing to step in and do whatever ministry is needed?

Smith: Our motto has been, "Do whatever it takes." The men who move up to deacon are generally men of that attitude, men who will do whatever it takes. This attitude is incorporated into their spirit and service. They are able to sacrifice without recognition and do whatever it takes. That's key to the success of this ministry.

Payne: It appears that the deacons have understood their biblical position--they are not overseers of the complete ministry of the church, but servants. Would you say this attitude produces a wonderful Christian spirit that overflows onto the church body?

Smith: Yes, definitely.

Payne: What would you say is the general attitude of the deacons toward the pastoral staff? Is this ministry an encouragement to you and the other pastors?

Smith: Yes. They honor us, just as we honor them. They have a tremendous respect for the office and calling of a pastor. I have always been successful when I call them up and ask for help. If one deacon cannot help out, then he gets another man who can.

Payne: Concerning giving, do all the deacons tithe?

Smith: Yes. A minimum of 10 percent. All the staff, Sunday School teachers, etc., are required to tithe.

Payne: Are giving records utilized in the questionnaire and selection process?

Smith: When one agrees to be a deacon, he agrees to give up the right to keep his giving records confidential. If a deacon has stopped being faithful in attendance, service, etc., the financial records might be looked at . . . Some people want to put three dollars in the offering plate and then expect to get three dollars of enjoyment, three dollars of excitement, and three dollars of Heaven in a brown paper bag and take it home with them. And, that's basically what they want out of church.

Payne: Is there anything else you would like to share?

Smith: Probably, but that's all I can think of at this time.

Payne: Well, thanks and may God bless you and FBC Woodstock.

Number 2: Chairman of Deacons, Rhon Redwine

**Rhon Redwine, Chairman of Deacons
First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Georgia**

Introduction: *This interview was conducted with Rhon Redwine, Chairman of Deacons, First Baptist Church, Woodstock, Georgia, by the author, 23 October 1995, tape recorded telephone conversation. Woodstock is a thriving church just north of Atlanta, Georgia. Bro. Rhon is a godly man, and loves to serve the Lord. He and the other deacons are a blessing to their church and staff.*

Payne: Bro. Rhon, thanks for taking the time to do this interview. I'll start by asking you a few introductory questions. How long have you been at Woodstock Church.

Redwine: Since June of 1991.

Payne: Did you move to town or did you just join there?

Redwine: We just joined the church. We had moved further south in the county and the drive to our previous church was just getting to be too much. We were having to pack up the kids and drive, so we started looking around and found Woodstock.

Payne: What size was the church then?

Redwine: I think about in the 800-1000 range. It was just two or three months prior to moving into our current facility.

Payne: So you have experienced tremendous growth? What do you all run now in Sunday School and Worship?

Redwine: Worship is about 3500, Sunday School fluctuates between 2700 and 3000.

Payne: So you joined Woodstock in June 1991; when did you become a deacon?

Redwine: September of 1992.

Payne: Had you served as a deacon prior to this?

Redwine: No, I had not.

Payne: Please tell me a little about the role of a deacon at Woodstock. What do you see yourselves as being and what are you doing?

Redwine: First of all, we see ourselves differently than the traditional deacon body in a Southern Baptist Church. We do not perform any administrative functions. All leadership in decision making for the direction of the church is performed by our pastors and some committees. We like to consider ourselves strictly a ministry to the body and to the community. One of our ministries includes counseling at the altar for people coming forward desiring to make a decision for Christ--salvation, rededication, church membership, baptism, or just to have a prayer. Our wives also help us with this ministry, especially with the needs of women. Also, we have a deacon on call every evening who catches the needs of people calling in after church hours. God has blessed us with a wonderful staff that works well with the ministry of the needs of the people. However, they need a break--they can't do it 24 hours a day. We like to think we are helping by being available after hours. People call the church and get a recording with instructions on how to reach the deacon on call, and we get calls. With that, we also have a deacon prayer chain. If someone has an emergency prayer need, they call the office or the after-hours recorder and the deacon on call activates our prayer chain. We have a system set up where we can pass the information on to each other and be in prayer for that need.

Payne: You guys are actually involved in doing ministry then, not in the business affairs of the church. You are not involved in approving the new roof, etc., right?

Redwine: In the book of Acts when it says "this business," we understand that "this business" refers to serving tables.

Payne: Yes. I agree that you are correct on that. Has the deacon ministry always been geared in this direction, or was there a transition either before or after you came?

Redwine: It's been in that direction since I came. It was just a couple of years after our pastor came that the change took place. As I understand from some of the other men, the deacons went on a retreat one weekend. The pastor ask them to describe what they did and they decided to list these functions on a board. The pastor then challenged them to open up the Word of God. As they read, if there was anything listed on the board that was not in God's Word, they would cross it off. Well they ended up crossing off a lot of administrative functions. From that point, the deacon body turned from being an administrative body to being a ministry body within the church.

Payne: Has that change been a blessing to the church?

Redwine: Certainly. Furthermore, I think that since the deacons have understood what their true function is it has made them more effective at reaching people. I believe any time God's man or God's people are obedient to His Word that blessings do come forward for the whole body.

Payne: I agree with you. And, the servant position of a deacon is supported in the Book of Acts. How often do you men meet? What is the content of your meetings? Who meets with you? etc?

Redwine: We have a scheduled meeting once each month, usually the first Sunday of each month right before the evening service. However, we don't meet just for the sake of meeting. If we have upcoming activities that we need to coordinate we will come together and lay out our plans; but, if there's nothing in that month, then we just drop the meeting so we do not consume unnecessary time. As far as those attending, it's usually just the deacons; the pastor and associate pastors are always welcome to come, but it's just usually the deacons. The pastors stay very busy.

Payne: Are you involved in any of the church discipline or anything of that nature?

Redwine: Very rarely is the whole deacon body involved in that area. Primarily, staff and other selected people handle those concerns. We had one instance recently involving the discipline of a particular man. We did call all the deacons together just to notify them--we felt it wise because the church family might have questions and someone might ask a deacon what's going on. This way we felt that any of the deacons could give a correct response. There was no voting or anything of that nature, it was just a time to inform the spiritual leadership of what was going on in that particular situation.

Payne: What do you understand the role of the pastor to be? How do you see your pastor through a deacon's eye? You say that the deacons are servants, but what about the pastor and pastoral staff?

Redwine: The pastor is the undershepherd. God speaks through him and provides leadership through him. We look at our relationship with our staff like this: they are more the front-line troops than we are. We like to feel that we're reserve troops; we are there and available to them whenever they want or need us to come alongside them and help. We help them going to funerals, going to visit families, ministering to families and we just surrender ourselves to them to be used in any fashion they feel we can be used.

Payne: And there's blessing in that, isn't there?

Redwine: Yes.

Payne: Just by talking to Ken Smith I get the impression that the pastor/pastoral staff

regard you men very highly and would want to help you in any way.

Redwine: Right. For instance, if the deacon on call gets a situation that is over his head a minister is on call and is always available to him. In that way he can help us counsel people in the right direction or help us refer them to other sources of help.

Payne: Do you take precautions in the area of altar counseling when dealing with such issues as troubled marriages, etc.?

Redwine: We try to handle basic counseling needs. When we feel we're getting in over our head, we refer them to a particular staff member.

Payne: The reason I asked, I had spoken to another church which had been really cautious in this area because of the possibility of law suits being brought against churches. They were afraid someone might accuse a counselor of giving bad advice. That could be a lot of pressure for anyone.

Redwine: We are cautious in that area.

Payne: About how many deacons do you have?

Redwine: Approximately 40

Payne: How many members do you have?

Redwine: I have no idea, but there is no member-deacon ratio that must be maintained. Actually, we send out a questionnaire, we review the men, then whoever seems to be qualified is selected.

Payne: What else might you tell me?

Redwine: One other area of ministry we are involved in is right by the book-- we do serve tables. For instance, when we have senior adult days, widow/widower banquets, or other similar events in the fellowship hall, the deacons are usually the ones who serve and clean. Also, we have a prayer time; we come together and pray for the needs of the church on Saturday mornings. It's not that well attended, but there are a few faithful men that come and we pray to the Lord on behalf of the church's needs. It's a good time, the Lord meets with us there. Also, we have been responsible for reviewing candidates being ordained to the ministry. That was quite a responsibility for a group of laymen--to review a man who may have been called by the Lord to preach. So we've recently shifted that in the direction of the pastor, but there are some deacons involved in that review committee; still it's not a ministry of the deacons. However, we still help review deacon candidates.

Payne: Do you consider the selection process for deacons to be very important?

Redwine: Yes. I think we have a very good selection process. We put out a list of each man that is 21 years or older who has been a member of the church for more than a year to the congregation. The congregation then makes nominations. At that point, we send out a questionnaire to all the nominees. We think it's a thorough questionnaire, with doctrinal comments. I believe you can really tell where a man is in his understanding of the Word of God, and even where he is in his relationship with the Lord, by reviewing his answers on this form. After the questionnaire, we bring him in before the deacon review committee and interview and get to know him and try to determine if he meets the qualifications of Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3. If we are in complete agreement as a group, the five to seven of us who are there, then we will present each qualified man to the church for a vote.

Payne: I suppose the pastors participate in this selection and review process?

Redwine: Yes, they know the nominees. The list and the completed questionnaires are submitted to the pastor for his review.

Payne: This sounds like a good process. It appears that you look at a man's spiritual walk and the service he is already doing more than anything else?

Redwine: Yes. I believe the Scripture says a man must first be approved. We take that to mean that he has been working for a while already.

Payne: From everything I've seen, yours may be one of the most clearly biblical deacon ministries that I've been able to find anywhere, so I want to take this opportunity to brag on you. I met with Ken Smith for about an hour, and he really had praise for you men and said you did a tremendous job. I pray that God will bless you. I can tell by talking with you that you are a man who loves the Lord and that you walk with him. You're probably a witness for Him, aren't you?

Redwine: Well you know, it's all Him. I don't want to say anything about myself. I would love for everyone to enjoy the same sweet relationship with the Lord that I have, or even better.

Payne: Well, I really appreciate your time very much. Is there anything else that you'd like to talk with me about?

Redwine: No, but if anything else comes up that you need to know, just call me.

Payne: Thank you and God bless you.

Part C: First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida

Number 1: Pastor Homer G. Lindsay, Jr.

Number 2: Chairman of Deacons, Edmund "Bud" Whittaker

Number 1: Pastor Homer G. Lindsay, Jr.

Pastor Homer G. Lindsay, Jr.
First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida

Introduction: *This interview was conducted with Dr. Homer G. Lindsay, Jr., co-pastor of the First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida, by the author on September 27, 1995 in Jacksonville. The church averages well over 6,000 in Sunday School each week. The interview was tape recorded.*

Payne: In a nutshell, could you give us your ideas on the deacon's ministry.

Lindsay: We select our deacons through our Sunday School program. They come from the men's Sunday School classes. We have separate classes, because in the average Southern Baptist adult department you have about two women for every man. The women dominate the department. They run it, and this is the reason women like couples classes because they like to dominate their husbands. It makes it extremely difficult to reach men. When you do get a new man in, it makes it difficult to hold on to him. I wanted to reach men believing that the Lord's work was a men's movement. He gave himself three years to men and that's why we started this men's program. It has worked.

Because our emphasis is the Sunday School we would not elect a man deacon who was not involved in Sunday School and visitation. The deacon is already doing what a deacon ought to do or he wouldn't be a deacon in our church. However, we have not burdened him down with so much that it would hurt his family life, etc. He's here Sunday, Tuesday night, and Wednesday night--that's three nights a week which is almost half of a man's week. The Southern Baptist program of dividing the church membership among the deacons would not work in our church--it would wreck a man's home life. He couldn't do it, so we didn't institute that program. We only have a deacon's meeting about three times per year. When we call a meeting there is a reason. This was done about 22 years ago by the deacons. This was their idea, although I welcomed it. I actually feel the deacon ministry here is not all that involved. It's mainly counseling with persons who come to make decisions, taking care of money--collecting and counting, and ushering. It is not an overload because he's here anyway. The counseling does require him to be here 30 minutes after everyone else is gone--he is usually one of the last to leave. If he is part of the counting committee, they have to pay a price.

Payne: The general overall structure is one of servanthood, helping out, and they are not considered a board and are not expected to oversee the church?

Lindsay: That's right. Benevolence is another important area where they serve.

Payne: Do you consider that a deacon's primary purpose is to reach people for the church.

Lindsay: Yes. We had a meeting recently and it was like a mini revival. We have averaged baptizing over 900 a year for about 20 years. That is the heart of a deacon's ministry.

Payne: Are the deacons involved in leading these people to Christ?

Lindsay: Yes. Although not as deacons, just as Christians. Wherever they serve in the Sunday School, they perform this function.

Payne: What attitudes do you notice among the deacons and how important is their attitude?

Lindsay: Our attitudes are influenced by something that's bigger than we are--the goal of reaching this city, which has been our 20-year goal. It is such a mammoth undertaking that the goal swallows us up as individuals.

Payne: What would be your advice to other pastors as they look toward developing and encouraging their men to be focused on Jesus?

Lindsay: Consider the deacon your friend, don't make little sliding jokes about deacons from the pulpit which are unworthy. When they don't agree with you, then don't consider them adversarial; consider it a stop light, re-think, pray, and re-plan. I wouldn't necessarily let deacons stop me from doing what God wanted done, but I would not want to damage a deacon in accomplishing the goal. My usual method has been to throw things out for prayer in a sermon and have the church praying about it for a year before I discussed it with anyone. It has worked beautifully here. If one gets all excited and comes in and unloads on them when it's a complete surprise to them, things do not work well. We must give them a time to pray and think and take away the shock of the suggestion. I think the method of doing things matters most. Respect them as God's leaders in the church. If they don't measure up to our thinking, that's really God's business. In Acts, He took care of them and He can take care of them today.

Payne: Do you consider a man who is focused on prayer, reaching others for Jesus, being in the Word, and being a servant someone whom you should pay attention to?

Lindsay: Yes.

Payne: When a man disagrees with you and you feel he is walking with the Lord, do you

consider this a time to pray and seek God's face again?

Lindsay: Yes. A man can get so caught up focusing on one thing that he loses perspective. Sometimes he needs to pull back and look at the bigger picture, then he may see things differently. I've seen many pastors who felt that God had given them something and it must be done regardless and they've been even willing to destroy churches. It's wrong. Churches have often had misfortunes with pastors--every pastor hasn't measured up. Some of the people who have been in church have been there pastor after pastor. You have to win their hearts, love, and allegiance. They have to believe in you, especially if you want to lunge into some large undertaking.

Payne: Do you think that it's more healthy to let the deacons discipline themselves? What would be your approach?

Lindsay: We have no set procedure for dealing with such situations. We had a deacon picked up in a sting, of course it was very shocking and embarrassing to us. We dealt with him very quickly, so he resigned. We told him we were interested in helping him. I guess it depends on the seriousness of what has happened. Some have been very lax as deacons. We really didn't do anything about it because they weren't hurting anyone except themselves. I guess it depends on the situation. Time is a healer and all people have the mountains and the valleys.

Payne: Any closing statements.

Lindsay: I'm thankful for deacons. God has been so good to give us men of vision. When we bought this building, we didn't use two floors--we actually grew into them. This was the old Gulf Light headquarters building. During a period of years, we bought 80 pieces of property--all with vision, believing that God was going to grow and do something here. Now we use every piece of property for church business. My whole ministry has been in Florida except for my student ministry in Texas. To grow a church in Florida, one must make it a number one priority to reach the lost. There's no other way. Those who are not growing don't have the right priority. It has to be your priority and you must do it; then you must develop your people and make it their priority.

Payne: Do you think it's been helpful to the church overall to see the pastors and deacons out there being soul winners?

Lindsay: Yes. I think so. You pass through phases in church growth. You reach a plateau and then you have to really pray and study how to move off the plateau. We've "plateaued" again, but we want to move up. We'd like to run 8000 instead of 6000 in Sunday School. If not planned, you'll stay there. Pray, plan and try again. We have not been afraid to venture out. This church has never taken the "we've never done it that way" attitude.

We delayed building our main auditorium for more than 10 years. That's when Dr. Vines came. Instead of building, we got a second pastor. Then we continued to grow and had to tackle that building. I didn't know if we would ever build. We thought of going to three morning services, but we ran out of space on Sunday and Wednesday night services, and we couldn't have two Wednesday night services. We tried two Sunday night services, and that didn't work well.

Payne: Is there any thing else you would like to share?

Lindsay: No, that's the heart of it.

Payne: Thank you for your time Dr. Lindsay.

Number 2: Chairman of Deacons, Edmund "Bud" Whittaker

**Mr. Edmund “Bud” Whittaker, Chairman of Deacons
First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida**

Introduction: *This interview was conducted with Mr. Edmund “Bud” Whittaker, Chairman of Deacons at First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida, by the author on September 27, 1995 in Jacksonville. Bro. Whittaker has been a member of the church for more than thirty years. When given the opportunity to set up a new office for his company in the late 1950's, he chose Jacksonville because of his love for FBC. His ministry includes developing and writing training manuals for the church's invitation counseling. He and his wife are highly committed to personal soul-winning.*

Payne: Are you presently serving as Chairman of Deacons?

Whittaker: Yes, this year.

Payne: Have you previously held this position?

Whittaker: One time before.

Payne: What are the underlying principles for deacon ministry at FBC?

Whittaker: We operate on the basis that it's not an honor to be a deacon; we honor the office of deacon. We expect our deacons to be leaders, or as we call them, front-line managers, but they are to have a servant's heart. It's a working job. Deacons serve on at least one other committee. They are elected for a period of four years and then rotate off.

Payne: How does the church select deacons?

Whittaker: We have a church nominating committee that meets in October for the purpose of nominating deacons. Nominations are made by the 30 or so teachers of the men's classes in the Men's Sunday School Department, the pastors, and the deacons. The nominating committee then submits these names to the pastors, deacons, and men's Sunday School

teachers. This list includes personal information for each nominee, including their address, phone number, children, involvement in church functions such as outreach, how long they've been members of the church, etc. For a man to be considered, he must be faithful to participate in visitation each week. This list also includes the person who nominated each man for deacon, and therefore helps to assure that the one being nominated is involved in visitation, etc. This list goes before the men's teachers for their comments and concerns and is a sure guarantee that each man is an active, faithful member of the Sunday School, the visitation program, etc. on a regular basis. This gives the teachers closest to each man a chance to say, "No, this man is not faithful and I would not recommend him." In this event, such a man would not be recommended.

Payne: These teachers would comment regarding the nominee's faithfulness as a Christian?

Whittaker: Yes. Any person who would be considered would have to be a faithful, active Christian and churchman. We believe that the priority of the church is to reach men, women, boys, and girls for Jesus, get them baptized and in Sunday School and teach them the Word so they can grow. This is the priority of the church, the Sunday School, the music program, etc. This also has to be the priority of the deacon. We use the Sunday School as the primary outreach tool of the church.

After the above process is completed, the remaining nominees receive a questionnaire asking whether they would agree to visit, tithe, etc. and whether there are any problems with their wives, etc. If there is any history of divorce by the husband or wife, they are disqualified. These questionnaires are fully reviewed and others may be disqualified before a list is presented to the church.

Payne: So you feel the selection process is extremely important?

Whittaker: Very important. Again, it's not an honor to be a deacon--you honor the office of deacon. This principle was established by Dr. Lindsay, Sr., 50 years ago and it works!

Payne: How do the deacons perceive themselves? Are they servants of the church? Are they here to oversee the church? In what areas do they minister?

Whittaker: Dr. Lindsay and Dr. Vines are two strong pastors. We give them the prerogative of controlling the staff. They hire and fire staff, but usually discuss this with the Finance Committee. But the deacons do review the budget ahead of time after it is prepared by the Finance Committee and the pastoral staff. So, the deacons are not just a board of directors--not in this church. We think, just as the Bible says, we are to be servants--not a governing board. They are not nominated because of their experience as business men; they are nominated based on their spiritual walk.

The pastors and staff prepare the budget, then it is submitted to the Finance Committee. The Finance Committee is made up of deacons. This Committee goes over it in detail to ensure that there hasn't been any oversights or to see if there are any further

suggestions that might help. Then the Finance Committee presents the budget to the deacons as a whole before it goes to the church. With such a large budget, it helps to have a number of people review it to ensure there are no mistakes.

The budget is important. We have about an 8.7 million dollar budget. We teach tithing for one full month every year. Here at First Baptist, we have no debt. We operate on a pay-as-we-go plan. Last week we read the budget to the church and tonight we will vote on the budget. However, as a deacon body, we spend relatively little time discussing the budget; most of our time is spent praying and giving testimonies.

Payne: Concerning meetings, how often do you meet?

Whittaker: We meet based on need. Because most of our deacons are Sunday School teachers and workers, they're out in the community visiting. Added to this, they have jobs, they have families, and they have other commitments. Therefore, we choose to meet only when there is a need. When we do, we get on our knees and pray, and the meetings are spiritual in nature. At our last meeting, when we were looking over the budget, I asked for testimonies affirming what the Lord was doing in their lives. Different ones spoke about how they had led people to the Lord, and we want this attitude and work to continue.

Payne: How many meetings do you have each year on average?

Whittaker: Approximately four, maybe five, depending on circumstances.

Payne: Are these meetings peaceful and without a lot of bickering and ill feelings?

Whittaker: We prepare an agenda for each meeting based on staff and pastor recommendations. Each group of items is presented for discussion.

Payne: How long will an average meeting last?

Whittaker: One and one-half hours. At our last meeting, we discussed the budget for 35 to 40 minutes, mostly with the pastors and myself making comments about the different areas. The rest of the time we spent sharing testimonies, etc.

Payne: I understand your church has a rotating system for the deacons. Is that right?

Whittaker: Right, so that each can serve four years and take a break. A deacon may come back if the nominating committee selects him--if he has behaved himself (laugh). If a man has not gone backwards spiritually, he may be nominated again. Each man is required to continue his visiting and tithing according to and in compliance with the Biblical plan. In my opinion, all Christians should tithe.

Payne: How is discipline handled among the deacon body to ensure a man's spiritual walk?

Whittaker: To date, we've had good success with our men. But we handle it within the deacon body.

Payne: If there is a problem with someone, he would be approached by the deacons?

Whittaker: Yes

Payne: Who participates in the laying on of hands in ordination services?

Whittaker: The ordained deacons and ordained pastors who are present perform the laying on of hands. Others, including family members, are invited to attend as well. Ordinations are held the last Wednesday before the last Sunday of the year, between Christmas and New Year. Then we have a deacon's retreat in January.

Payne: How long does the retreat last?

Whittaker: A weekend. Dr. Page Patterson taught Galatians to the deacons during that weekend this past year. Last January was our best retreat to date. It was held at the Sawgrass Marriott and it worked fine. We had more than 400 people attending. Our music department provided us with music, and at Dr. Lindsay's request, we had two testimonies at each session. Dr. Patterson's wife, Dorothy, worked with the wives on Saturday morning.

Payne: How do you view the role of the deacon's wife?

Whittaker: Very important. They are included in the training at the deacon's retreat, and yes, they are expected to be faithful as the deacon's are.

Payne: Your church sponsors one deacon's retreat per year?

Whittaker: Yes. Apart from that, we have an ambitious and aggressive outreach program. Our goal is to reach Jacksonville for Christ. We're constantly working to keep our people out and reaching people for Christ.

Payne: Apart from the retreat, do you offer other training?

Whittaker: Yes, we require the deacons to be decision counselors. All of them are expected to do it. I wrote a book that outlines what this involves. In February, I teach the book to new deacons and any who want to attend again. A series of que cards has been developed to use in counseling with a potential convert to help in presenting the Word. The open Bible can also be used. The cards outline salvation, scriptural baptism, church membership, and rededication. We even have one set that deals with counseling on the home.

Payne: The que cards ensure that each deacon will feel comfortable in a counseling situation?

Whittaker: The easiest way to learn is to use the cards, because they're complete with the Scriptures.

Payne: So when the deacon determines the particular need of a person he is counseling, he can go to the set of cards and find a Scripture outline dealing with that area of need?

Whittaker: Correct. The men like the cards.

Payne: Is there any prerequisite training before becoming a deacon?

Whittaker: New deacons attend the class I teach on decision counseling. They are also welcome to come and observe the other men who are already serving; they can do this until they feel comfortable that they are ready to do counseling themselves. Deacons are cautioned that they are not to talk about marital problems, monetary problems, etc. They are to stop at that point and say I'm here to help you to find Jesus or to become stronger in your spiritual walk, but I'm not here for other counseling. If other counseling needs are apparent, the person is then referred to our counseling pastor, Rev. Blair, who is in charge of our Biblical Encouragement program. This procedure is to prevent legal problems and law suits.

Payne: How many active deacons will serve at a given time?

Whittaker: Approximately 250.

Payne: How many are you averaging in Sunday School?

Whittaker: Between 6000 and 8000.

Payne: How many attend Morning Worship services?

Whittaker: Close to 8500. We can accommodate 9300 in the new auditorium. Because of our large program, we must have this number of deacons. We have approximately 200 ushers during morning worship.

Payne: Do the deacons serve as ushers?

Whittaker: No, the deacons are in charge of ushers. Since they handle the usher ministry, they are delegated authority to recruit other ushers. Also, the deacons do the counting of monies as noted on the list of committees. Counting responsibilities are also rotated so the same deacon or deacons are not always counting. This prevents anyone from devising a system to pilfer the offerings. Our pastors and the Finance Committee do not handle any of the monies as such.

Payne: At one time, offerings were not taken in Sunday School. Is that still the policy?

Whittaker: Yes. Some people may bring Sunday School offerings because they can't attend worship, but we have someone designated to handle this. Primarily, we receive offerings during worship services. This method was implemented by Dr. Lindsay, Sr. and was done for a number of reasons, including to prevent any dishonest actions.

Payne: What else might you tell me about your deacons?

Whittaker: The key is that the job is a working servant, the deacon must serve the Lord through the church and they must stay focused on reaching people for Jesus. We expect the deacons to be soul winners in this church. This is our basic requirement. During the course of a year, our church offers training on how to be a witness.

Payne: Do men who are active in soul-winning demonstrate a positive attitude in the church?

Whittaker: Absolutely. When one is involved in soul winning and the Lord's work, he does not have time to cause problems. If I may state one observation, that's why so many churches have problems. The deacons sometimes have an idea that they are to run the pastor's business and run everybody else, and that is not how it works. They run off many good pastors because of a lack of spirituality and by not focusing on what they're to do. This applies, really, to every area of Christian life. We tell the deacons that they are front-line managers of the gospel and they're expected to be examples of reaching people for Jesus and then for following through and getting them baptized and in the stream of the church. We don't accept members unless they are baptized.

Payne: Are you on staff here?

Whittaker: No, I'm a layman--a businessman.

Payne: How long have you been affiliated with First Baptist, Jacksonville?

Whittaker: Since 1958. We moved on Saturday, and moved our letter on Sunday.

Payne: You were affiliated with Dr. Lindsay, Sr?

Whittaker: Yes. I served with Young Couples until growth necessitated two departments. Then Dr. Lindsay, Jr., came along and asked us to establish the men's program. He chose me and another to work here as co-directors. We picked up about 800 men from all the Sunday School, brought them in, and averaged 300 in attendance. Now we have built to 1100 average per Sunday. I've been involved in traveling the country talking to churches about starting this type of ministry in their churches.

Payne: How many hours do you put in with the church in a typical week?

Whittaker: I have done most of my writing on Saturday mornings at home. However, my wife and I serve the Lord 24 hours per day. Our whole life is involved. I'm 73 and I retired at age 66. I said, Lord, I want to devote all my retirement time to you by being a soul winner. He has used me and given me good health.

Our focus, both my wife and I, is to serve Jesus through the church. I often times tell the men in our meetings, and what have you, that the crown jewel of all the church's organizations is the Sunday School, but the jewel and the crown of the Sunday School is outreach--reaching men and women, boys and girls for Jesus. And that should be our focus. I believe that all men should be soul-winners.

Payne: How many people have you helped lead to the Lord?

Whittaker: I don't keep track, but maybe thousands. It's been my pleasure to be involved in soul winning. My philosophy is that first, I believe all men should be soul winners; secondly, all men should serve Jesus through the Church; and thirdly, all men should be tithers. And it works! Jesus said, ". . . as my father sent me, so send I you." I told the pastors that churches need to be revitalized and refocused, and the Sunday School needs to be re-energized, and we really need to get back to basics. So many churches are going the way of the world. They focus on socialism, politics, etc. It's Jesus, Jesus, and Jesus.

Payne: Do you have anything else you would like to share?

Whittaker: No, that about does it.

Payne: Once again, thanks for your time and may God bless you.

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