

Part 1 - Election of Deacons

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[0 : 0 0] have a singing after we reflect just for a few moments on this this passage and how it relates to the election which we are currently undertaking in the congregation at the moment the election of deacons. Perhaps you feel that the election of deacons should be a simple thing it should be just a straightforward routine in the congregation and we shouldn't waste any time on it. I with all due respect I would have to disagree with you on that one but we always have to be reminded of the Bible and what the Bible says to us and be guided by the Bible in everything that we do particularly we heard this morning about choices and the importance of choices and some choices being more important than others and this is a choice which is very important because it relates to the future of the congregation. That's why we ground everything we do upon the scriptures.

There's a Latin phrase that says sola scriptura and that's a principle that ought to run not just in the in the church but in my life and in your life as well and that means the Bible alone and the Bible alone in determining what a deacon is in this case and in determining what how I should go about voting for a deacon. The origin of deacons is found here in Acts chapter 6. We'll read it together once again page 1101 Acts chapter 6 and it rose out of a problem that had arisen in the very early church at that time. There were several problems. There was persecution from the outside. The Jewish leaders were looking for ways to destroy the church at that time. That was one problem that the church faced.

There was corruption from within. You would never think that the church even in these early days would suffer from corruption from within but all you have to do is go back to the previous chapter chapter 5 and you'll discover a man called Ananias and his wife Sapphira who tried to steal and try to not steal but to lie to the Holy Spirit in order to retain money for themselves. There was also distraction and that's the problem we read about in the sixth chapter. The problem was that the distribution of food amongst the widows of that time was not being fairly carried out. There were two groups of widows. There were the Hebraic widows and the Grecian widows.

This was a kind of it was almost a kind of a discrimination problem. That's what we would call it nowadays and it had crept into the church at this time. I suppose we all suffer from that to a greater or lesser extent and certainly the church did. Wherever you get human beings you get problems and you get tensions and you get conflicts that arise. There is nothing unusual about conflicts even in the church and I always try to explain that to somebody and say well why is the church? Why are there so many conflicts in the church?

Well because we're full of human beings. Human sinful human beings and the challenge that the church faces is not to avoid conflict. I don't think I think sometimes the avoidance of conflict can be unhelpful and it can lead to greater amongst amount of tension. The challenge that faces the church is not avoiding conflict. It's managing conflict. It's managing conflict and where you do get disagreement is to resolve it in a way that will try and bring glory to Christ and will not be a barrier to the church's mission to bring the gospel to every every creature and that's exactly what we find here. It's a masterpiece of resolving conflict by proper management. What happened was there was a complaint and the complaint was looked into right away. No time was lost because some of the widows felt that they weren't being neglected. They were being neglected because the distribution of food was not being managed properly by the church. Now the apostles could have chosen to take over the distribution of food themselves. That was one option that was open to them but that would have meant that they wouldn't be able to give any time to the work that the Lord had given them to do. God had called them to preach the gospel, to study the word, to be prayerful and to go out into the streets and into the towns and villages and to make Jesus known.

[4 : 53] And nothing must come between them and that work. That meant that they had to bring in the skills and the resources of men within the church who were able and willing to give of their skills in order to resolve the problem.

And there you have the appointment of the first seven deacons. They are here. Philip. Now Philip went on to be an evangelist.

This was only the beginning for Philip. This was the first stage in a lifetime of service to the Lord. And who knows perhaps some of the men who are on the list that you are being given, who knows what God's future is for them and who knows how this will be a good experience for them as a beginning for a lifetime. Our whole lives are a lives of service to the Lord, whether we are ministers or missionaries or whether we are workers locally or every, all our lives are a life of service. And there are Procorus and Nicanor and Timon, some of these men we never hear of again. They obviously work silently away in order doing their job. And this is the only word that we have of these men. And yet they, here they are, the very first deacons.

Now there are four things that strike me about this, about this passage. First of all, is that power does not lie in the church ultimately with what people critically call a few men at the top.

[6 : 33] Power in the church, in actual fact, there's only one person with whom there is power in the church ultimately.

And that is the Lord Jesus Christ. And whilst there is authority in the church and that authority is real, it is only in so far as the Lord himself delegates that authority to those who he has called into such a position.

Do you know the first thing he requires of anyone in authority in the church is that they themselves be servants. The key word in any kind of leadership position in the church is servanthood.

And that was made very clear in chapter 13 in John. We all know the chapter just before Jesus was arrested at the time of the Last Supper. He washed the feet of his disciples much to their shock and surprise.

But this was in order not only to demonstrate what he came to do for them, but in order to set them an example as to how they must manage his church.

[7 : 50] And the first rule of management is Christ-like servanthood. So if you think that being a deacon or an elder is some kind of promoted position, you're wrong.

It's a position of huge responsibility. But we never cease to be servants of the Lord.

We are to be servants of the Lord. We are also to be servants of one another. See, too many people misunderstand authority in the church. Authority is Christ's and Christ's alone.

And our job is to simply apply that authority and apply the Bible to the fellowship of the Lord's people. But even there, we see from this chapter that this important decision, although it was made by the brothers, it pleased the whole church.

In other words, it was approved by the whole church. And that's why you as a congregation, the membership in the congregation, is being asked to give your approval to up to 15 of our male members to become deacons.

[9 : 10] Because it is important that the whole church make this collective prayerful decision. And it goes all the way back to what we find here in chapter 6 of Acts.

So I hope then that we don't have a misunderstanding when it comes to authority in the church and power in the church.

But the second thing that strikes me is that these men, these seven men, were chosen for three things. They were chosen, first of all, for their spiritual character. What does it tell us about them? Therefore, brothers, verse 3, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit. Now there's only one way in which a person can be full of the Spirit, and that's by coming to faith in Jesus Christ and living with Christ at the center of that person's heart.

Now in a sense, we should all, in fact, in every sense, every Christian should be full of the Spirit, filled with the Spirit. And yet there were obviously men amongst them who, perhaps, because they had come to realize the challenge of the gospel, and because they had come to, they lived in a manner that was closer to the Lord in prayer, that became their commitment to the Lord, their love for the Lord, their fullness of the Spirit became more and more evident to those around them.

[10 : 46] It may not have been evident to them, but it was evident to those around them. Their love for the Lord, their love for the church. And a love for, let me tell you this, a love for the Lord and a love for the church makes a person willing to work for the Lord and his people.

Anyone who puts the Lord first puts the Lord's people first and who puts the gospel first. You can't separate these two things. You can't say, I love the Lord and sit at home and do nothing. There is very little evidence in a person of his love for the Lord.

But a person who loves the Lord evidences that by a love for the people of God and a desire to see them. In other words, these men would have been eager to help out with this problem.

And that eagerness would have been recognizable by the rest of the apostles, and they would have said, these are the men we're going to choose to be deacons because they're so willing. A willingness is a sign that a person loves.

Now, there are all kinds of circumstances which you have to take into account.

[11 : 58] There are, for example, our busyness in our jobs. We live in a very stressed age, a stressful age. And many of our young men, they are not able to give the time that they would like to give to the diaconate because of that.

And because they're not able to give that time, that does not mean that they are not filled with the Spirit. But it means that they are, for the moment, they are not able to give because of their particular responsibilities at that time.

Everyone's circumstances have to be taken into account. So please don't conclude that because certain names are not on the list, that these names are not eligible in some way.

There are all kinds of circumstances that we have to take into account. But they were of spiritual character. And that's what we need to look for.

Of that kind of eagerness and willingness and commitment to the gospel that was so evident in these men that were chosen there. Then there was a good repute. There we are in verse 3.

[13 : 12] Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute. In other words, people who were known for being Christians. First and foremost, when people in the locality thought about them, they said, that person is a Christian.

That person is a follower of Jesus. And there must be no double-mindedness. A person must be consistent in their Christian witness if they're going to be, if they're going to take leadership, a leadership function in the church.

And then they must have wisdom. Wisdom. Wisdom is, of course, a very important word and a very important character. The Bible has much to say about wisdom.

How do you define what wisdom is? Wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord, the Bible says. But wisdom is the ability, I believe, to be able to think through prayerfully a situation.

Not rush to a conclusion. Not being impulsive in any way. Not reacting angrily to a situation. But being able to sit and to think for a moment and to pray over a situation.

[14 : 20] And to have the kind of experience and the ability to be able to work out all the possible outcomes. And how it's going to affect various things. Wisdom is a great quality to have.

And we all lack it to some extent and in some circumstances. And we pray for more wisdom. Wisdom to be able to deal.

And I suppose wisdom is always tested in awkward situations and difficult times. When you're faced with difficult choices and decisions. Choices that are not perhaps so obvious.

Then we need that wisdom to be able to apply ourselves there. Now if you add to those qualities the list that the apostle makes.

Then you have an impossible list of qualifications. Who can live up to these things? I certainly can't. And I doubt if anyone here could stand up and say I live up to these qualities.

[15 : 18] And yet these are the things we have to keep at the forefront of our minds. You must be worthy of respect. You must be not greedy for dishonest gain.

Not addicted to much wine. You must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them be tested first. Let them serve as deacons. Look at that word serve.

Serve once again. The key word here is serve. If they prove themselves blameless. Managing their households well. Well who's able to do any of these things?

Who's able to do any of these things? We all have to hold up our hands and say. Well we can't.

Except with the help of God. And yet we have to work with who we have.

And you have to work with me. And I have to work with who. We're all frail human beings. Who are trying to serve the Lord. And trying to pray. And that's why please. Well can I ask you please to pray.

[16:17] Pray for the deacon's court. You know it sounds so grand doesn't it? It sounds so grand. The deacon's court. All you have is a bunch of sinners. Meeting there. Trying to work out various problems.

Trying to come to the right conclusion. And trying to discuss it. And come to a consensus. And all of these things. That's all we are. Sometimes we make mistakes. And sometimes the mistakes are maybe obvious to you.

And you say well. What kind of a decision is that? Well. We make mistakes. Will you please pray for us? Will you please pray for those who are elders. And those who are ministers in the church. Please don't expect perfection. We can't. Because we're not perfect ourselves. Please pray that we will be able to proceed. With the work of the Lord.

In a way that's glorifying to him. And you know what else that strikes me. In the last place here. That the word of the Lord continued to increase. Verse 7.

[17:16] The word of the Lord continued to increase. You know what happened? That this choice of men. It resulted in the gospel being spread. Further and further.

And more and more people hearing the gospel. And coming in. Because the church is not about buildings. I know that our work is about buildings. And mansions. And money.

And all of that sounds so tedious. And yet. Someone has to do it. Someone has to do the work that we all find a little bit boring and tedious.

We have to take charge of it. Because it's the Lord's work. And if we manage what God has given us. Remember that this building that we're in. It's a building that God has given us.

As a gift. Our mansions are buildings that God has given us. The hall next door. Look how much good has been done in the hall for our young people. That's a gift from God. Somebody's got to look after it.

[18:14] On a day by day basis. And pay for the repairs and upkeep. Make sure that it's good. These things are not easy. They require all kinds of tedious meetings. Like property committee meetings and all the rest of it.

But that's what it means to serve. It means to get our hands dirty for the work of the Lord. And as we do so. God has blessed us. And God we pray will continue to bless us.

But we must never ever ever make the mistake. Of thinking that the church is only the building. Or only the hall. Or all about roofs and windows and electrics. It's not. It's about people's lives being touched by the gospel.

Why are we making such an issue of this? Because this gospel is so dear to our heart. Because of its message. And it's dear to our heart. Because God has touched us.

In Jesus Christ. And he has given us a focus. On his church. As a means of fellowship. And the one thing that we all want this evening. Is for that church to develop.

[19:14] And for us to have a greater sense of fellowship. And for the Lord to speak to us. Day by day. Week by week. By his word. And to touch the hearts of more people.

People who tonight are not here. But you people we hope and believe. Will one day be here. And will themselves be touched.

By the gospel. Now just let me say. I know that this is perhaps a combination of an intimation. And you know that intimations are part of the worship. We very often forget that.

But intimations are part of the worship. We're going to see in a few moments. That the giving of our money is part of the worship as well. But let me just say. Say very very briefly. Members in the congregation.

Will you please take an envelope. On your way out. If you haven't taken one before. Inside that envelope. You'll have a form. The thing is.

[20:09] Do not put your name on that form. And the reason is because. We want it to be a completely secret ballot. We want. We don't want any awkwardness. Whatsoever. And the first thing that will happen at the count.

Is that the envelopes will be separated from the forms. So that nobody will know. Who's voting for who. And that's very important. To preserve anonymity. So please don't put your name.

On the form itself. Put your name and address. On the envelope. In fact the first thing you do. Is

take the envelope. Put your name and address on it. Take the form out. Vote for up to 15 men.

On that form. But on no account. Please vote for more. You can vote for less. You can vote for six.

You can vote for two. You can vote for ten. But please don't vote for any more than 15. Of the names that you see there. The names have not been given. In any order whatsoever.

[21 : 06] They're in the order they appear. On the congregational role. According to their districts. They're not in any order. Of any kind of preference. Or importance. Or age. Or anything like that.

They're there. Just randomly. And what we've done this. And I hope that nobody is offended by this. In any way. We've tried to identify.

Who these men are. In order. In terms of. Their nicknames. Because this is a community. In which nicknames are very important. And we've tried to do that.

In order to make sure. That the congregation. Because the last time we did this. A lot of people said to me. That. They didn't know who. So and so was. So we've tried. To identify.

To help. The congregation. In order to locate. Who is who. Amongst. Those. That list. So what you have to do. Is you have to pray. And you have to ask.

[21 : 59] That the Lord will give you guidance. And that you have to think about those. And if you don't know. Who a name is. Then don't vote for him. How can you vote for somebody. You don't know anything about. You can't do it.

So please don't vote for anybody. You don't know. And then. And then. Vote for those. Who you believe. Come close. Nobody matches. The criteria.

That we've just spoken about. In the Bible. Nobody perfectly matches. But. Those who come closer. You know. The other thing. That strikes me. In Acts chapter 6. Is that.

There were only seven voted. There were only seven made deacons. That does not mean. That there were no more men. Who were filled with the spirit. And that does not mean. That there were no more men. Who were involved.

In the work of the church. It simply means. That this was a way. Of discovering. How. The Lord was calling. Certain individuals. It is not. A promotion.

[22 : 53] It is simply. It is a calling. In which the Lord. Through the will of the church. Calls certain individuals. Into certain acts of service.

That is what it is. It doesn't mean. That if you don't get voted. That the church is rejecting you. In some way. It is not rejecting you. At all. There is work for everyone. Everyone to do.

We are all. Involved. In this great work. Now I hope. I have said enough. I know I have combined this. With an intimation. And I think with good reason. But I hope.

That I have given. The biblical basis. And I hope. That I have been able to help. In some way. In this process. And if there is anyone. With any questions. Will you please. Give myself.

Or Mr. McLeod. A call. I will be very happy. To answer these questions. Now we are going to come on. To another subject. We are going to sing. We are going to.