***The Pastor-Teacher and the Deacons

Colossians 1:1-2

COL-015***

Our topic is "The Salutation," number 15 in Colossians 1:1-2.

The local church is to be a reflection of the church universal, the invisible body of Christ. The unifying principle of the local church is to be the Holy Spirit-generated love among the believers, and its operational basis is to be the grace of God. The local church is designed to reflect its distinction from Judaism and the Old Testament lifestyle of legalism. The church should not look like made-over Israel. Christians who make up a local church are governed by the doctrines of Scripture, and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit in their corporate ministry. What we do must be based upon the Word of God. What we decide must be the result of being guided by the Spirit of God. The ministry of the local church is the expression of believers who are filled with the Holy Spirit, exercising their various spiritual gifts.

So, the local church is a body of Christians brought together by Jesus Christ in a certain geographic place in order to perform a special mission. And each Christian in that body has a role to play which is specifically designed for him. No one else can do it quite as good and as well the way he can.

The parables of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 13 give us a preview of the nature of God's reign on earth during the church age. Jesus told us that there would be certain things that would be characteristic during this period of the kingdom era in its mystery form. One is that church organization would be a mixture of true believers and false professors. Also, it would be a time of monstrous growth of ecclesiastical organizations which serve Satan and not God. It would furthermore be a great movement toward apostasy as the age progresses. Israel temporarily is laid aside by God, and is viewed as His hidden treasure within humanity. The church is related to Jesus Christ personally as His personal pearl of great price.

The organizational structure of the local church evolved gradually in New Testament Scriptures to a congregation which was led by a pastor-teacher-elder, and by board of deacons. The primary divine mission of the local church is to prepare believers to use their spiritual gifts in God's service. The local church, therefore, has the mission of feeding believers the spiritual food of doctrine via the pastor-teacher-shepherd. Furthermore, the local church is a training station, training in the techniques of the Christian life in order to prepare its members for spiritual combat in the angelic warfare of daily life. Every Christian is commissioned by Jesus Christ to teach doctrine as he goes through human society to teach from the grace of salvation to the earned rewards in heaven.

**The Pastor-Teacher**

Now, the key to all this falls very definitely upon the pastor-teacher fulfilling his mission as per Ephesians 4:12, which says, "Having given pastor-teachers for the equipping of the saints, for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ." It is the pastor-teacher that makes it possible for Christians to be equipped with doctrinal understanding on a consistent, complete, and in-depth basis. It is the pastor-teacher who thereby enables believers to use the armor of God in order to engage successfully in spiritual combat. It is the pastor-teacher who thus, in turn, enables believers to build up the body of Christ, the church, by victories in their service.

Now if that system breaks down at the point of the pulpit, the whole grace system of perception and development of Christian character and Christian maturity breaks down. It's simply not possible. Therefore, if you get a pastor who doesn't know his job, then he is a terrible disaster. It does not mean that he will he not fill your congregation. He probably will. And I guarantee you that it doesn't mean he's going to get a $300 offering when he needs $3,000. People will be there. They'll be eager to give. They can't give enough, especially if they're charismatics. But what they get is pure husks, (pure corncobs), and many people go into God's eternity, and only when they stand before Christ to evaluate their lives will they realize what has been done to them. If it breaks down with the pastor-teacher, you may very well have a successful church organization, and usually you do, from a business point, and from a world point of view. But you have nothing successful from the point of the individual Christian's eternal standing before the Lord.

Therefore, it is important to look upon this issue of the pastor as the local church administrator. The elder-bishop is given a very specific mission in Acts 20:28. The apostle Paul is speaking to many pastor-teachers from all over the city of Ephesus. He is at the seashore, about to board ship and sail to Jerusalem. And he tells them that they will never see him again. God has made it clear that this is their final meeting, so it is a very special poignant farewell.

So he wants to prepare them for the work that they should be doing as the leaders of local churches, and to focus them upon that which is their primary mission. In Acts 20:28, therefore, he says, "Be on guard for yourselves, and for all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers." That's another term for pastor-teacher-elder-bishop: "To shepherd the church of God which he purchased with His Own blood." This word "shepherd" looks like this in the Greek Bible. It's the word "poimaino", P O I M A I N O. "Poimaino" (poy-mah'-ee-no) means "to feed." It is translated as "shepherd" because that's what a shepherd does. He guides the sheep around to where the food is. This word means to feed spiritually here in terms of teaching people the doctrines of the Word of God.

The performance of this service, of course, requires that there be somebody with the gift and ability to do this. And Ephesians 4:11 is referring to this when it tells us that God the Holy Spirit has given the Christian church, apostles and prophets (who are no longer on the scene), but evangelists and pastor-teachers, that we still have. They are there to do the feeding.

This is further confirmed for us in 1 Peter 5:2. Peter says, "Shepherd (same word), feed the flock of God among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God, not for sordid gain, but with eagerness." And he tells the pastors (the spiritual leaders of the local churches) what they should do, when all of the apostles are now gone, and they're dying off – they must take over in what their job is, to now build upon what the apostles did in feeding people the doctrines of the church age. These will now be recorded in New Testament Scriptures, and it'll be their job to learn to study the Word of God, and be prepared to explain it to God's people. So, the elder-bishop-pastor of the local church serves as a shepherd by using his pastor-teacher gift – the ability to teach spiritual things.

In 1 Timothy 3:5, we have another word describing what the pastor-teacher is supposed to do: "And if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?" To take care of the church of God is the main business that he has. And this is the same word which is used in the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:34-35, relative to care of the wounded man by the Samaritan.

So, it is a very clear word. We are to take care of the people of the flock. It is our duty to prevent them from being wounded (from being hurt) by a variety of means, not the least of which is counseling them with the Word of God by teaching them the Word of God, so that they know how to meet the problems of their lives. They know how to meet their marital problems. They know how to meet the rebellion of their children. They know how to meet the wrong ideas of their children, and are able to have the courage to say, "No, you can't do that. I will not let you feed at a pig trough. I will not let you squander your life in a dissipated manner while you are under my roof, and under my care. I will see to it that you will do that which is for your best, and that which is honoring to God. So that is the business of caring for you. The idea is to keep people from getting hurt in the long run.

One of the things that some of the people in our party, when I was on vacation, wanted to do in Rocky Mountain National Park was to climb Long's Peak. It's the highest mountain in northern Colorado, 14,255 feet. It's a very strenuous climb. When we came to the Rocky Mountains, it was amazing how much snow was at the top of the mountains. As I suspected, there was going to be a problem with anybody climbing because, at the upper levels, there was ice and snow. I have myself been turned back once with a Berean Youth Club trip camp that could go no further because of the snow and the ice. And as we discussed the situation with a ranger, and what could be done, they had very strong discouragement even on climbing another mountain that still had snow fields across the trail that could be hazardous. And then somebody said," Well, why are there these very stringent rules, and are you sure we couldn't make our way through?" And the Ranger says, "Well, we have these rules because we don't want you to get hurt." And he was saying, "I want to be your shepherd." And the shepherd keeps people from getting hurt.

Now that is a very significant thing. The poor Samaritan who had been so wounded, what he needed was care, and that's what the good Samaritan gave him.

What this word implies is watching over and meeting a person's spiritual needs. Now, it requires a lot of different means; agencies; organizations; and, approaches to do that. But it ultimately comes to the bottom line – that it's the business of the pastor-teacher to care for the congregation, and to care for their spiritual needs. And he does that through the teaching of doctrine. Now, they do have other needs. They have social needs, and have other needs in their lives, but those are not his responsibility, and they're not the responsibility of the local church.

This care consists of the pastor conveying God's point of view toward life in ways that are suitable to the particular age that he's teaching; to the spiritual maturity that he's teaching; to clarify what may be short in their understanding; and, to try to impress it in such a way that they remember.

So, whenever a list of characteristics and responsibilities of the pastor is given in the New Testament, it is understandable that there is always one ability that is there. Without it, you cannot perform the elder-bishop-pastor-teacher role upon which the whole structure of the local church depends.

In 1 Timothy 3:2, we have this said about the pastor-teacher, that he must be: "Able to teach." He must have the capacity to be able to convey spiritual things.

1 Timothy 5:17 says, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching."

Then Titus 1:9 adds this observation to us: "Holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching." This is advice to the pastor-teacher – that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine, and to refute those who contradict.

Now, there's no way that you can do this – that a pastor-teacher can instruct the people of God if he doesn't know anything himself. There's no way he can do this if he doesn't have the tools that make him capable of analyzing what is in the languages of Scripture.

I had a pastor one time telling me how he would lie in bed at night, and mull over what he thought would be helpful for the people for him to talk about at the service the next day. He's lying-in bed, and he's mulling it over. He's not sitting at his desk, thinking. He's not analyzing. He's not checking the languages of the Greek and Hebrew. He's not looking at the structure of theology. And he is going to find something that the people need by lying in bed and thinking about it that night. You can't do that. All he'll come up with is something that's hot in his mind at the moment, and something that interests him at the moment, and that's what he'll talk about.

No other duty is placed upon the pastor beyond this ministry. He does have to do administrative work. He does have to be an organizer. He does have to be a troubleshooter. He does have to be an arbitrator. And he needs certain skills for doing that. But they're all for one purpose – so that the time can come when he's free; able to have prepared; and, ready to stand in the pulpit and instruct the sheep – to feed the sheep of God.

As the final decision-maker in an organization – here's where the buck stops with the pastor-teacher. He governs himself by the policies of the church – the general principles of that congregation that have been enunciated by the people of that congregation. And then he puts into practice the objectives of the people. The pastor has to make decisions, therefore, with extreme maximum objectivity. He cannot be emotional about these things at all. What he does has to be based on the facts, and not in a surge of emotion – not his or someone else's. Very often, the pastor is faced with somebody who comes to him with great emotional urgency, and says, "Here, this has to be done. Here's something we take action on." And they want to propel him into some action, and some panic button-pressing. And those who are experienced and mature know immediately that they may respond by saying, "No, what I have to do at this moment is exactly nothing. All I have to do is think my way through doctrine and the will of God." He has to have extreme objectivity.

The issue to the pastor has to be: what is okay with the Lord? It is not what is okay with his family, or his friends, or the financial contributors in the congregation, or anybody else. He is in the position to have maximum insight from the Word of God about a certain issue. And he is the object of an enormous amount of information that comes to him from inside and outside the congregation. Members, of course, are always free to express their views; their concerns; and, their recommendations. And indeed, they should. But when he comes to making a decision before almighty God, it has to be based upon the objectivity of the Word of God; his maturity; and, his own leading of the Spirit of God.

Now, when you have differences of opinion in a local congregation, then you require an umpire with some final authority to decide. When you have strong-willed, pushy members who will be unwilling to abide by the decision of the leadership, they will create dissension. They will then go around trying to seek to rally people together to their cause, and to undermine that which has been decided upon. And there are always enough dumb Christians standing around who become part of somebody else's problem. This is particularly a great concern and a great problem when you have men who do not have manhood. It's very difficult for Christian men to have manhood. Therefore, they are subject to the pressures and the whims of their wives. They are subject to the pressures and whims of their children. They simply cannot stand up and be leaders of God. They do not have doctrine; they're not in temporal fellowship; and, they do not have spiritual maturity, and the consequence is that their manhood has been eroded. And when that happens, the disasters are very great for that family, and for that individual.

When there are dissensions, somebody makes the responsible decision and that's the executive head of that work. The right course, if you disagree, is to pray that the Lord will enable the congregation and the pastor to see your point of view, and that you are right that that is God's point of view. And if it is, you should ask God to change the minds, and change those who are mistaken, so that they may give up their resistance to the Holy Spirit. Now, that's exactly what God will do if you are right. And if the pastor's decision is wrong, God will not let it ride, I can assure you. If it's wrong, He will not let it ride.

He, of course (the pastor), is not perfect, but neither is a board of men perfect. And their decisions are not always exactly what they should do at any point in time. But a spirit-led pastor and a spirit-led board will be the first, I can assure you, to change to a better course of action as the situation clarifies. You may have made a decision on the basis of the moment. A problem has arisen that you have to deal with. And here's what you have to remember – that the pastor-teacher can deal very easily with problems in such a way that there's an enormous circle of injury. But the guy who's mature, and who knows his job, and who knows his business, does not go right to saying, "I'm going to straighten this out. Here it is. And we're going to punch noses." He protects his leaders; he protects his workers; and, he makes correction with a gentle hand, not of one who lords it over them, but one who is a fellow-soldier, and who needs correction himself as they need correction. And he makes the correction, and he gently brings it about, so that there is not a wide circle of injury. He always seeks to restrain the injury that could be created.

Christians who are immature spiritually do not give other Christians much slack. And they are above our contempt. None of us is so perfect that other Christians do not deserve our giving them some slack, such that when they don't hit the ball quite right, they readjust it. And we get better as we go along. But those who are godly men and godly women, when they get a better perspective, they correct; they rearrange; they resolve; they bring their people in line; they do things better; and, they don't pretend that they're perfect gods. And I have no apology for saying that we have to change our minds, and we have to readjust what we're doing, because there isn't anybody who is omniscient, and therefore, who is perfect.

Now, if your view on a matter is not accepted, it may not be because you're wrong. It just may be that it's not God's time for it. And it's blasphemy for us to bemoan our not being able to change things, as if our ways were certain to be the Lord's ways. If they are the Lord's ways, then they will come about. If they are not the Lord's ways, it is an insult to the ability of God and His faithfulness to deal and to care with the problems of His local assemblies. It is never a matter of dignity. It is never a matter of propriety for people to fracture the unity of the Spirit of God. If there is ever a sin for which God brings judgment into eternity upon a Christian, it is to violate what Paul calls "to maintain the unity of the Spirit." We don't create that unity, and we are the ones who are able to maintain it.

So, this kind of pious moaning, in reality, comes from people whose sin natures have been frustrated. Their lust for power has been denied. Their lust for praise and approbation has been undermined. So, they either try to gain their way in devious ways, instead of waiting for the Lord; or, they just move on to some other scene where they can be a power structure.

Those who are upon the church boards are there to help the pastor in these decision-making responsibilities that bear very heavily upon him. The church board is not there to take over. They usually are not informed. And those who are mature are men who say, "Tell us the story. What's the picture? Give us the information. Here's our advisement." And when that kind of a group is working, God's work is accomplished.

1 Peter 5:3 warns us of a potential problem that comes to the mind of most people about a pastor-teacher and the authority that he bears in the congregation. And please remember that he bears that authority because the congregation voted him into office to bear that authority. And he retains that authority as long as he comports himself with the principles of biblical doctrine. In 1 Peter 5:3, however, there is this warning: "Nor yet to the pastor-teacher-elder as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock."

This specific statement of doctrine forbids a pastor lording it over his congregation. He does this by disobeying the lines of authority that begin with the congregation. He does this himself by disobeying doctrine. And he comes under divine discipline by God when this happens. And he, if necessary, will be removed by God from his office. He is not to Lord it. And what this verse is telling him is that if you do act in a way that is improper with doctrine; improper with the Word of God; or, improper with the objectives of the local church, then God will deal with you. It is God who is the vengeance-taker, and it is God who will deal with the minister who lords it over the congregation so that he abuses them.

It is blasphemy to even suggest that God's system of local church leadership, vested in an elder-bishop, can result in victimizing the congregation. You will not see that go on very long. You cannot victimize the congregation.

Now, you can victimize the congregation if you place a board in charge of the church. This is one thing that the communists learned early on: have a committee. A committee can beat the brains out of everybody else because they have mutual reinforcement. But if you're one man out there, all by yourself, accountable to a whole congregation, it's very hard for you to get away with lording it, and doing that which is improper in relationship to your authority to that congregation.

**Qualifications for a Pastor-Teacher**

Now the qualifications for an elder-bishop-pastor are very specific. We find them in 1 Timothy 3:2-7, and we have gone over those in detail elsewhere. But they're all very important, and they give us a total picture of what kind of people should be in the ministry, and who should not. These, of course, do not imply that the pastor has to be sinless. His old sin nature is still there. We do expect him to neutralize it in the maximum way. What these requirements do, in 1 Timothy 3, imply that the pastor is to be the one who has the quality, in himself, of jerking his own sin nature back into line to conform to these qualifications. That's what it's all about. It's telling the pastor that this is what you should be, and this is what should be circumstances in your life. And if they're not, you are to observe this and you make correction. This is the guideline. What this list means is that the pastor-teacher-elder is to have stability in these qualities so that he is not easily moved away from them. He has to have the courage that comes from knowing that you're right.

I read an article written by one of our "great Christian commentators, Cal Thomas. And in it, he quotes from a book written by a man named Norman Rose, written about Winston Churchill. And in the process of it, he quotes Henry Kissinger on some things that he observed about the late British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Henry Kissinger is not one of my favorite people. He has not been all that hot in his foreign policy activities that he's been engaged in. But he has made an observation that I thought was quite astute. He makes a distinction between the heroes of the past and the superstars of today. He says, "Superstars strive for approbation (praise). Heroes walk alone. Superstars crave consensus. Heroes define themselves by the judgment of a future they see as their task to bring about. Superstars seek success in a technique for eliciting support. Heroes pursue success as the outgrowth of inner values."

Cal Thomas goes on and says, "A real leader does not seek to make his followers comfortable in wrong beliefs, but tries to convert them to true beliefs that can be validated objectively. A real leader can, and should, occasionally appeal to emotion, but does not rely upon it. A real leader believes emotional satisfaction derives from proper intellectual stimulation." I thought that was very good. And I must tell you I pray that that would be true of me. That is indeed true pastoral leadership in the finest tradition of the Christian church from ages past.

**Deacons**

There is one other office in the local church, and this is the office of deacon. Deacons in the Bible deal with the material leadership of the local church. We have them referred to in Philippians 1:1. And they're differentiated very clearly from the office of the elder-bishop-pastor-teacher. It is not accurate to assign spiritual leadership responsibility to deacons. That is not their province in a local church. Now, there are some groups like the Baptists, who do not have elders as their spiritual leaders. They have deacons. Therefore, they now come to a problem of what are you going to call the men in the Bible who are assigned the work of supervising your material finances, and the plant, and the physical structure, and all that. So, they've come up with the word "trustees." They have come up with a non-biblical word, because they have, in the first place, used a biblical word in the wrong way.

Deacons in the Bible, such as Philip and Steven, were engaged indeed in spiritual activities and spiritual leadership with their spiritual gifts. Their gift was evangelism and teaching. But that was a separate function from their official role in the organizational structure of the local church's deacons. A deacon is not a spiritual leader. A deacon is not there to assist in spiritual matters. His realm is the physical plan.

Now, of course, he is going to have a spiritual influence. What kind of a spiritual man he is, is very much going to affect the pastor, and very much affect the value that he is to the leadership of the church. It is vital to the local church to have a functioning board of deacons to assist the pastor in administering the church material and financial structure. It is impossible to function without them. And things grind to a halt if you don't have deacons who can do the job of taking care of the properties, and men who, while not holding the official position, yet act as deacons in bringing their skills to assist the deacons in the care of the properties of the church.

Church ministry will be greatly restricted if the deacon board is not carrying the ball. The material facilities, please remember, set the scene for spiritual work. And we forget how much the deacons are doing. Who comes and opens the doors in the morning? Who comes and turns off these terrible alarms? Who comes and checks the comfort of the auditorium? Who comes and checks the facilities that are needed – the electronic things. All of that has to come together. Who walks around the property and looks and says, "This looks ugly," and fixes it? This is why we have men that we depend upon. And because we have them here in such excellent degree at Berean Church, we just forget that we are blessed to have them, and we would be poor without them.

**Servants**

The word "deacon" looks like this in the Bible. It's the word "diakonos" (dee-ak'-on-os) D I A K O N O S. The English word you see is merely a transliteration of the Greek word. Greek letters change into English letters, and the word "deacon" comes from that. What this Greek word means is "servant." It means one who is engaged in a ministry of service. And it comes from another word which is the root word from which this comes. And that root word means "to hasten after," or "to pursue." So, in effect, the deacon is a runner. He relates to dealing with his work by running after what needs to be dealt with. This word stresses the servant's activity in his ministry. So, we have the servants at the Cana wedding in John 2:5. That is the same word. They were the "diakonos." They were the people who were there serving in this capacity. They were servants.

Now, there's a difference in the Greek language between a servant who is a slave and one who is a free person. The one who was slave is called a "doulos" (doo'-los), D O U L O S. And you have this for example in Matthew 22:2-14: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding for his son. And he sent out his slaves (and it uses this word 'doulos') to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast. And they were unwilling to come. Again he sent out other slaves" (again, "doulos" – a different word). Now these slaves are servants, but they're involuntary servants: "Tell those who have been invited, 'Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen; and, my fattened livestock. They're all butchered. Everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.' But they paid no attention, and went their way: one to his own farm; and, other to his business. And the rest seized his slaves, and mistreated them, and killed him. But the king was enraged, and sent his armies to destroy those murders, and set their city on fire. Then he said to his slaves (there it is again), 'The wedding is ready. But those who were invited were not worthy. Go, therefore, to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast.' And those slaves (there it is again) went out into all the streets and gathered together all they found, both evil and good, and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests."

So, this word "doulos" does not have an option. When the master tells you to do something, you do it. But on the other hand, the diakonos (dee-ak'-on-os) is a free person who chooses to serve. And that's the name that is given to this category of church officers.

Now, this word "doulos" is a respected word. The apostle Paul is fun of saying, "I am a bond slave of Jesus Christ. His will is my will. He does what he tells me to do. That's what I do."

Notice the servants in Matthew 22:13: "Then the king said to his servants, 'Bind him (that is the man who came in with the improper dress, unworthy – not worthy to be in this wedding feast): bind him hand and foot. Cast him out into outer darkness, in a place where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen." This is the word "diakonos," again – our first word. These are free servants. These are people who chose to be hired.

So, the "doulos" servants of God are men who bring in the guests. And the analogy compares to us – we do that through witnessing. We are slaves of God to be His ambassadors. However, the "diakonos" servants of God, in this analogy, are actually the angels who execute the king's sentence.

So, the word "deacon," from the Greek language, implies that he is, above all, a man of activity – a man who performs a service. The word "deacon" is used as a general term for service, and it is therefore applied either to men or women. Women can be called "deaconesses." It is used of domestic servants in John 2:5. It could be men or women. It is used of a civil ruler as a servant of the state (Romans 13:4). It's used of Christ as a servant of the circumcision (Romans 15:8). The word "deacon" is used of various church leaders as workers (2 Corinthians 3:6, 2 Corinthians 6:4). It is used as the pastor-teacher (1 Corinthians 3:6, 1 Thessalonians 3:2, Ephesians 3:7). It is used of a Christian woman named Phoebe as a servant of the church of Cenchrea (Roman 16:1). And it is even used of the servants of Satan (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). They are deacons. They are servants, by choice, of Satan.

So, the word "deacon" in the New Testament came from the general Greek language. But, as often happens, the Holy Spirit takes a word, and then He gives it a very special biblical meaning. It thus has the technical meaning of referring to a church officer, the deacon, as per Philippians 1:1. And this person is a man who is in charge of the local church business.

In terms of its church use, it is only applied to men. There's no such thing as deaconesses in the Bible for church office. Christian women are deacons as servants of God, but they're not office-holders officially.

The origin of this office is in Acts 6. It does not use the word "deacon," but what it describes is what deacons do that indicate to us that this is indeed what the apostles were putting together. In Acts 6:1-7, the word "diakonia" (dee-ak-on-ee'-ah) here is that which is to serve: "Now at this time, while disciples were increasing a number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of the food." This daily serving is the Greek word "diakonia," which again means "service." Here it was the service of material care.

Verse 2 says, "And the 12 summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, 'It is not desirable for us to neglect the Word of God in order to serve table." Now, here's a verb: "diakoneo" (dee-ak-on-eh'-o). All of these words are related to the word "deacon:" serving. Here was a problem in the Jerusalem church. Because of the great increase, suddenly, in the membership of the various house churches, the Grecian Jews complained of the neglect of their widows. They said that the Hebrew Jews getting the favored treatment of the church's welfare program. So, they referred to the daily charity work of the church, in this passage, and the Palestinian Jewish Christians, who were in majority, and in authority, were apparently getting favored treatment over against the non-Palestinian Jews and their widows.

So, the 12 apostles, when the work was small, could handle these problems. Now they said, "This is too big. We can't handle this kind of thing anymore. We need other people to take this over. Our job is to teach the Word."

So, the apostles made a decision. The question of local church organization necessitated a church business meeting. So, in order to resolve this problem, that's what they did. They said, "We must not be limited in our time for prayer; our time for study; and, our time for teaching the Word. If we do that, both the material and the spiritual things will be neglected."

The apostles had a recommendation. Verse 3-6: "'But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, who whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.' And the statement found approval with the whole congregation, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; and, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. And these they brought before the apostles, and after praying, they laid hands upon them."

So, the procedure here was to follow up on a recommendation of their spiritual leadership. They told them, "Here's the kind of men you should have. They have to be males. There are no women officers as deacons. We recommend seven, at this point, for the size of what we're dealing with. And these are men of honest report." That means that they have good reputation as Christians. They're positive to the Word: "They're full of the Holy Spirit, which means that they know how to confess their known sins. They're spiritual men. They're not carnal yo-yos. They have a right relationship to the Holy Spirit."

Isn't it interesting that being rightly related to the Holy Spirit was more important in a deacon than the fact that he was a good businessman. How many times has a church said, "Oh let's find a good businessman. We'll make him a deacon." That is a very bad mistake. These were men full of wisdom, such that they had good judgment in terms of business matters and human relationships, and they had wisdom because they knew how to apply doctrine.

So, the congregation accepted this plan, and they selected the deacons. And the apostles ushered them into their office. This addition to the local church organization then prospered the local church ministry. We're told in verse 7: "And the Word of God kept on spreading, and the number of disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem. And a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith." They were even reaching the religious crowd.

So, the Word of God prospered because the apostles had time and energy for prayer and ministry of the Word. As church membership grew, it included, among many, antagonistic priests of Judaism. The deacons did their job, so the apostles were relieved, in fact – not just in theory. They weren't just office-holders. The deacons were really serving. And that made a difference. They took responsibility for the material care of the churches as a divine call. They were elected by the congregation. They needed no one to stay after them to do the work. They had eyes to see what was needed, and they did it. They had minds for solving the problems with consultation with the apostles. And actually, the deacon served as unto the Lord, and they didn't dare neglect their God-given responsibility and opportunity. God prospers and he blesses the man who gives priority to his duty toward local church matters, including local church financial matters. If deacons fail in their responsibility, the elder-bishop ultimately, who is responsible for getting things done, has to take over. And, boy, does that put another burden on him! This New Testament solution to relieve the pastor is the basis for the creation of other assisting boards to meet modern day local church needs. We have other boards on the same basis. They are to assist the spiritual leadership to do the job.

Please notice that the order of a local church business meeting wasn't a squabble of a bunch of sin natures. The pattern here is the meeting was called by the spiritual leaders because a real issue existed. They didn't just call the meeting because it was the time of the month for a meeting. It was not a monkey business meeting. They had something that needed to be done. So, they acted with responsibility.

The spiritual leaders, verses 3-4 tell us, thought through the problems before they called the congregation. They considered prayerfully all the possible solutions, and they produced a Holy Spirit-given solution. They were then able to answer the questions of the congregation, and the proposals of the congregation. And the congregation had an intelligent basis for a decision. No previous thought by the spiritual leaders will produce shallow, man-made, spur-of-the-moment decisions, doomed to failure. Great disasters have been brought into a congregation because somebody popped up, and thought something would be good to do, but the spiritual leadership was not prepared to say, "Here's the problem with what you're suggesting," and to put the brakes on people rushing head-long into something that, at the moment, seemed like a good idea.

Finally, when the congregation here in Jerusalem was presented with a real business issue, then the Spirit of God gave them a solution (verse 5). The church, having made a policy decision – the leaders then implemented it (verse 6). The leaders executed according to their judgments and their abilities. And God honored this business meeting with numerical and spiritual growth. That's the way to do things right.

**Qualifications for Deacons**

To be a deacon, you have to have certain qualifications. You will find those in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Our tapes on this will give you the meaning of these responsibilities in further detail.

Thank God for the local church ministry. And thank God for the officers who make it function for the humble people who support it, and for the Christians who do the work of the ministry. If the pastor-teacher does his job, and the deacons do their jobs, and all is unto the Lord, letting God resolve all the problems, and all the frictions, and all the differences, and all give a lot of slack to each other because they are all imperfect, then God can honor that congregation with great ministry; great blessings; great provision; and, great vision. And we shall all be the richer for that kind of a church, when we stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Dear Father, we thank You for our time together in the Word. And we pray that You will prosper what we have heard this day, and help us to respect this opportunity which has been given to us. Please bless our offering needs. And we pray that, in Your grace, You will finance us, so that all is cared for this week. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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