

The First Deacons, Acts 6:1-7

Having appointed an additional *Shepherd* to help *oversee* and *shepherd* the flock here at Viking Drive, these *Elders* see a somewhat urgent need for additional *Deacons* to *serve* the congregation. To that end, we'll carefully examine what occurred in Acts 6:1-7 when the church in Jerusalem was guided primarily by the *inspired apostles* and faced a similar (though *specifically* different) need.

It should be noted that our English word "deacon" does not occur in this text as a descriptive name of a church *official*, as in 1Tim.3:8,10,12,13 or Phil.1:1. "*Deacon*" is translated from the Greek term *diakonos* (*one who executes the commands of another; a servant*), and like other NT words, is used in both *official* and *unofficial* applications, cp. 1Tim.3:8 with Rom.15:8 (Christ), 2Cor.3:5-6 (apostles), 1Tim.4:6 (preachers), Rom.13:4 (governing authorities), John 12:26 (disciples), Rom.16:1 (Phoebe/Christian women). In these *unofficial* occurrences, it is typically translated as either "*minister*" or "*servant*." However, other forms of the word (such as *diakonia*) **are** found in Acts 6:1,2, and the specifics of both the *situation* and its *solution* strongly suggest that although not specifically *named* as such, these men were, nonetheless, appointed as the first *deacons* of the church at Jerusalem. **Therefore, it follows that when a congregation today has needs of specific servants, they should follow this passage** (as well as 1Tim.3:8-13) **and appoint deacons also.** To this end, let's carefully consider our text of **Acts 6:1-7** to note some particular points of pertinence....

1. The Need

- Was brought on by **increase, v.1a**. As the congregation *grew*, so did its *needs*.
- Additionally, a potentially volatile situation was arising; a **complaint** was voiced; and it had a **racial component** to it. **v.1b**.
- It was already a **daily** practice of the congregation **to provide food** for the **needy widows, v.1c**; cf. 4:32-35; see 1Tim.5:8-16 for additional instructions.
- The *legitimacy* of this *physical need* had the potential to affect **spiritual growth and development, v.2**.

2. The Duties

- Quite literally, **to serve**; specifically, "**the daily serving of food**" to the congregation's *indigent widows, vv.1-2*.
- But note also that these *servants* would be "**put in charge**" of this matter, **v.3c**. The term *kathistemi* means to *appoint to administer an office; to set one over a thing, to have charge of it*. In this case, they were to be "**put in charge**" of a *physically-oriented task* to: 1) meet a specific need of the congregation; 2) enable others (in this case, the *apostles*) to be wholly devoted to more *spiritually-oriented* duties, **vv.2,4**.

3. The Qualifications

- With no disrespect to the food service industry generally, or food servers specifically, **why did these men need the specific and spiritual qualifications** outlined by "*the Twelve*" (Apostles) to "*serve tables*"? Remember: 1) the

potentially volatile racial component of this situation, **cf. v.1b**; 2) that this *task*, though *physically-oriented* in nature, had **spiritual implications**- both for **the congregation**, and the **further work of the apostles, vv.2,4**; and, 3) that these men would be **“put in charge of this task,”** which would presumably include the procurement, preparation, and distribution of a *daily administration* of food for potentially a **great number** of *needy saints*, **cf. 2:41,47; 4:4; 5:14**. Therefore...

- The men *selected by the congregation* (**v.3a**) should be: 1) **“of good reputation”**- morally upright, **v.3b**; 2) **“full of the Spirit,” v.3b**- this likely refers to spiritual soundness exemplifying Gal.5:22-25 rather than as in Acts 2:4, since Stephen’s *inspiration* and Philip’s *working of miracles* are only mentioned after the apostles *laid hands* on them, **cf. v.6b; 8:14-19**; 3) **“full of... wisdom,” v.3c**- able to correctly apply *knowledge* and *understanding*; and (implied), 4) **capable of being “put in charge” of a task, v.3d**- competent to accomplish a specified duty.
- Additional qualifications were given later by inspiration to Paul for Timothy, but we’ll deal with those next week, if God wills it so.

4. The Selection and Appointment

- The **specifics of “how” these men were to be selected is not provided by inspiration**. Thus, we are entrusted to utilize means and methods that are compatible with Christian *thoughts* and *emotions* generally (**cf. 2Cor.9:21**), and the particulars and purposes of the situation specifically.
- It is worthy of note that though the *inspired apostles* surely could have accomplished this selection *for the congregation*, **they did not**. Instead, the congregation was instructed to **“select from among you”** these men; after all, they would *serve* and be the *congregation’s deacons* rather than those of the apostles. It is also notable that **all** of the men ultimately *selected* had **Greek names, v.5**, which probably indicates that the congregation not only well understood the potential volatility of the racial component of these things, but took it in account in their selections.
- When the congregation made *their selections*, **“these they brought before the apostles,” v.6a**. What, do you suppose, would the apostles have done **if** the men presented **did not** meet the *qualifications* specified? Surely the apostles would have rejected those men not meeting the qualifications, right? And so should Elders (since we don’t have apostles now) do the same today. But the congregation did well in their *selections* apparently...
- For **“after praying, they (the apostles) laid their hands on them,” v.6**. **Prayer** is always appropriate, but especially so in such occasions as this to entreat the Father’s blessing on a **specific spiritual task**, Acts 13:1-3. Note also that the apostles **“laid their hands on them.”** This particular act could have two possible meanings/purposes: 1) to *impart the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit*, as in Acts 8:14-18; 19:6; or, 2) as an act of *official appointment/ordination*, Acts 13:3 (the phrase is also used to refer to *arrest*, as in Acts 12:1, but such does not apply here). Perhaps **both** applications are utilized here, **cf. chp.7; 8:5-7**.

5. Conclusions

- a. Our Elders see a ***need*** for additional *Deacons* here at Viking Drive. Our current *deacons* are overloaded, and one has been appointed to the Eldership leaving an additional void. Hence, they asked me to present a lesson(s) to begin the process of “*select(ing) from among yourselves*” men who meet the qualifications and are willing to serve us and the Lord in this important capacity.
- b. The “process” will be the same as we utilized in *selecting* and *appointing* additional Elders- they will reiterate and explain it (again) soon. Let me just add this: If this process fails to *select* and *appoint* additional Deacons, it is still “successful” if: 1) none meet the qualifications; and, 2) are willing to serve. I hope such is not the case!
- c. The “*disciples (in Jerusalem) were increasing in number,*” v.1a. The Elders and I expect *the disciples at Viking Drive* to do the same! Having the personnel in place to serve and meet the needs of the congregation is an important aspect of such growth. So I appeal to those qualified to “*seek first the kingdom of God*” by being willing to serve, cf. Matt.6:33 and Gal.5:13.