

Acts 6.1-7—The Need and Benefit of Deacons

A complaint against partiality in the church, v. 1

- I. The church's ministry of mercy was tending to the needs of the Hebrew-speaking widows but neglecting the Greek-speaking (Hellenist) widows.
- II. This led to a complaint to the Apostles by the Hellenists that something needed to be done to redress the situation.

The need for a new office, vv. 2-3

- I. The Apostles recognized that there was a need in the church to which they not only could not attend, but weren't called to attend
 - A. However useful and urgent mercy-ministry was, it couldn't interfere with the preaching-ministry with which they were charged by Christ, cf. Lk 24.46-48; Acts 1.8
- II. But as it was a need in the church, the Apostles recognized that men should be appointed to it.
- III. They determined to set men apart unto the work—not volunteers, but men specifically called and officially appointed to meet the need.
- IV. The Apostles give us the design of this new office in v.2 when they describe it as *servant tables*. This means far more than the distribution of food and stands essentially for the distribution of the love of Christ in practical ways addressing needs of all sorts.
 - A. Moreover, it's an office designed by Christ to bear witness to the world of His own love and care for His church.

The qualifications for this office, v. 3

- I. They were to be men of good reputation, both within the church and without, cf. 1Tim 3.8-13
- II. They were to be full of the Holy Spirit, having a godly life in support of their good reputation, Gal 5.22-23
- III. They were to be full of wisdom to discern real needs and how to relieve them, and to counsel the needy, Js 3.16-17

The distinction between the church's officers, vv. 2, 4

- I. The office held by the Apostles is distinguished as *a ministry of Word and prayer* (with preaching).
 - A. Of course, in some ways the Apostolic office was unique, foundational, and therefore unrepeatable, 1Cor 3.10-11
 - B. But in the ways mentioned here, it was the forerunning office to the NT permanent office of elder (cf. 1Tim 5.17).
- II. The office of deacon is distinguished as *a ministry of mercy and relief to the needy*.

Deacons are elected by the people but appointed by the Apostles, vv. 5-6

- I. Two important principles of the presbyterian form of church government are evident in this passage:
 - A. The church has the right to choose her own officers, v.5. Officers are not to be imposed upon the church. The people are recognize and choose those whom God raises up from among them.
 - B. The church's officers have the right to appoint subsequent officers to their service, vv. 3, 6. Thus the church of Christ is not a democracy in which the power rests in the people's hands, but rather a presbytery in which Christ's power is administered through the church's officers, Heb 13.17; Acts 14.23; Tit 1.5

The benefit of this office to the ministry, v. 7

- I. When the deacons tend to the ministry of mercy and relief in a church and the Apostles/elders are freed up to give themselves to the ministry of Word and prayer, the church grows.

Reflections for Application

- I. The Lord builds His church with both those with needs and those with supplies, with some who possess and others who lack. This provides the church with the occasions to exercise sympathy, generosity, humility, and love.
 - A. Christ has appointed deacons in the church to remind you of your duty to be generous and to lead you in the exercise of it.
 - B. Your deacons stand before you as a beacon from Christ calling for your generosity and brotherly love. God gifts you with more than you need in order to test your generosity and brotherly love.
 - C. What are **you** doing for the needy in your church? What do you have to give? What can you do for others? —You're to see that no one for whom you're responsible endures hardship because of your lack of mercy to them. Therefore pray for a spirit of generosity and a hand of liberal service. Pray for a heart for Christ's church. Let it not be the last claim on your charity.
 - D. Consider three motives to generosity:
 1. Christ enriched you that you might enrich His church.
 2. To give to the poor is to lend to the Lord, Pr 19.17. No one has ever suffered loss by serving Christ's church.
 3. Your deacons depend on your generosity in order to fulfill their office. And would you have them complain to the Lord that they could do no more because you would do no more?
- II. You should prayerfully receive your deacons from Christ's hands.
 - A. Pray for them to be men of good repute, full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom from above.
 - B. Honor them; support them; help them; serve at their call.
 - C. Let them lead you in the show of generosity, the expression of mercy, and the exercise of hospitality & watch the church grow.