

The Fine Art of Waiting Tables

I. Introduction

- A. The first church in the first church problem was caused by that church's growth
1. Problem wasn't outgrowing building or parking lot—it was organization
 - a. After Pentecost, the church grew too fast to keep up with a count
 - 1) In **Acts 2:41**, 3000 were baptized; it then grew to 5000 men (**4:4**)
 - 2) The next progress report doesn't even try to give a number (**5:14**)
More and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number
 - b. There was persecution and the Ananias incident— still there was growth
 2. That growth was threatened by the demographic realities of this first church
 - a. Many of those converted on Pentecost were pilgrims in town for feast.
 - b. After baptism, they stayed in Jerusalem much longer than planned
 3. They were soon out of resources— and church (locals) gave (**Acts 4:34-35**)
³⁴*There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.*
- B. In **Acts 6**, the growth of the church is threatened by this diversity (**Acts 6:1a**)
In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews
1. Hebraic Jews were from Jerusalem; Grecian Jews were out-of-towners
 - a. Natural barriers would have made fellowship difficult—like language
 - 1) Hebraic Jews spoke Aramaic, the “official” language of real Jews
 - 2) Grecian Jews spoke their native languages (the “tongues” in **Acts 2**)
 - 3) Everyone would speak some Greek, but language was a difference
 - b. This tension spread to the distribution of aid to the widows (**Acts 6:1b**)
... the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.
 - 1) Were the locals not sensitive to needs of poorest of the outsiders?
 - 2) Or could the out-of-towners feel overlooked when they weren't?
 - c. Likely things were in such chaos that no one knew what went on
 - 1) Some remember passing out food after Isabel (20 tons of zucchini!)
 - 2) We worked hard, but the last thing we were was very organized!
 - 3) If someone claimed to be skipped, “*Sorry, here have some zucchini!*”

2. Whether the slight was real or imagined, the perception threatened unity
 - a. Apostles called church together (*10,000 members and no one has phone!*)
 - b. That's when the apostles came up with the idea of deacons (**Acts 6:2-4**)
Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables."³ Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them⁴ and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."
 - 1) Seven were placed in charge of this specific work of food distribution
 - 2) While not called "deacons," they are to "wait tables" (Greek word)
 - c. If you notice the list of names in **verse 5**, they are all Greek names
 - d. Problem was Greek widows (real/imagined), so appoint Greek deacons
 3. The point of these first deacons was an attempt to organize work of church
- C. Today the elders recognize the service of men who are serving this church
1. Several who have already been "waiting tables" will be appointed deacons
 - a. Those agreeing: Bill Foster, Jacob Peterson, Randy Tanner, Clifford Ivery
 - b. Join Hayward Glaspell and Joe Tatum (*there were others who declined*)
 2. Often we "choose from among you" (**Acts 6:3**) *More recognizing those chosen*

II. Two Points About Deacons (Read **1 Timothy 3:8-13**)

- A. **First**, deacons were servants of the church in a particular ministry area
1. These men were appointed to "wait tables" to distribute food to widows
 - a. That doesn't mean that they were not active in other spiritual service
 - b. The only two known (Stephen and Phillip) are known for their preaching
 2. But their special appointment here had to do with a special area of service
 - a. This is not an honorary title that you give to reward one— it is a job
 - b. No "deacons at large!" If job is over, he gets a new one or "disappointed"
 3. Deacons are not some ruling church board— they aren't in a "power chain"
 - a. In **Acts 15**, the church struggles with the issue of Gentiles and the law
 - 1) Those who initially met to discuss were "apostles and elders" (**15:6**)
 - 2) Later it was "the apostles and elders, with the whole church" (**15:22**)
 - b. There was no board of deacons to meet— deacons are servants, not board
 - 1) In fact, the Greek word for "deacon" is δίακονος, "one who serves"
 - 2) It was what Martha was doing while Mary listened to Jesus (**Lk 10:40**)
 - c. Deacons are appointed to serve the church in a specific job or task

B. Second, the main qualification of deacons living as a man of God (**6:3**)

³ *Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them*

1. Note what the apostles saw as traits needed for dispensing food to widows
 - a. They weren't looking for sociologists (*knew the special needs of widows*)
 - b. They weren't seeking grocers or cooks (*experienced in handling food*)
 - c. The only qualifications listed in **Acts 6**—full of the Spirit and wisdom
2. There are more specific qualifications or characteristics in **1 Timothy 3**
 - a. Many of these have to do with reputation (*wine, money, family, language*)
 - b. One of these qualities seems more applicable for elder than deacons (**3:9**)
They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.
 - 1) Deacons aren't, as some assume, just concerned with the material
 - 2) They must be "*committed to the mystery of the faith*" (NLT)
 - c. While they work with a specific job, there is more to them than just job
3. You see, there is something like an official "*office*" or "*position*" of deacon
 - a. No, deacons are not some sort of board of directors or governing body
 - b. But they do act as something of ambassadors or representative of church
 - 1) Paul address Philippians, "*together with the overseers and deacons*"
 - 2) There is something of an official role that deacons hold
4. The elders were told by several, "*I don't need an official title...*"
 - a. But we need them to have it—we need these guys to represent us
 - b. One thing these men do have in common—I will be proud to introduce them in our community or to other churches, "*This is one of my deacons*"

III. Conclusion

- A. I remember a church desperate to appoint deacons—they approached one man
 1. He said, "*I'm flattered, but I don't come to church much or give anything*"
 - a. "*I do like to get drunk occasionally, I chase women, and cuss like sailor*"
 - b. "*Don't make me a deacon; just consider me a regular, faithful member*"
 2. First and foremost, a deacon is a dedicated man of God who lives for Jesus
- B. But then all of us who live for Jesus are also servants—we all deac in some way
 1. We should all be challenged by the call to service (*should all have a job*)
 2. As we sing this song together, let's be challenged by the need to serve