

Sunday June 10th Deacons

- 1). This is one of those special and exciting occasions today as we come to set apart ten men and their wives to serve within our church in the ministry of deacon.
- 2). There is much within the church at large that has distorted and corrupted this extremely important ministry. In this morning's message we are going to look at the scriptural foundation for the deacon so that we can understand this ministry from the correct Biblical perspective.
- 3). There are three Greek words that will help shed light on the meaning of the word 'deacon'
 - a). Diakonos = a servant of the people, a waiter, an attendant – this is used 30 times in the NT.
 - b). Diakonia = a service or ministry to the people – used 34 times
 - c). Diakoneo = to serve the people, to wait upon – used 37 times
- 4). So then at the heart of all these words is the idea of serving the needs of the people, and within our context of course serving the needs of those within our body of believers.
- 5). If we go back into the OT we find there is a parallel with Israel in the wilderness and the NT deacon.
 - a). We find this with the tribe of Levi – God chose this tribe from amongst their brothers to be the servants of the people, the keepers of the Tabernacle of meeting, and servants to the Aaronic priesthood.
 - b). Nu 1:49 *"Only the tribe of Levi you shall not number, nor take a census of them among the children of Israel; 50 "but you shall appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the Testimony, over all its furnishings, and over all things that belong to it; they shall carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings; they shall attend to it and camp around the tabernacle. 51 "And when the tabernacle is to go forward, the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle is to be set up, the Levites shall set it up.*
 - c). Nu 3:5 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 6 "Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him. 7 "And they shall attend to his needs and the needs of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of meeting, to do the work of the*

tabernacle. 8 "Also they shall attend to all the furnishings of the tabernacle of meeting, and to the needs of the children of Israel, to do the work of the tabernacle. 9 "And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are given entirely to him from among the children of Israel.

d). Nu 4:46 *All who were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses, Aaron, and the leaders of Israel numbered, by their families and by their fathers' houses, 47 from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, everyone who came to do the work of service and the work of bearing burdens in the tabernacle of meeting- 48 those who were numbered were eight thousand five hundred and eighty.*

e). That the Levites were servants within the congregation of Israel is evident from our scriptures – we can see their service would be of course firstly to the Lord, as they would be faithfully obedient in the carrying out of their duties.

i/ In respect of the organization and operation of the Tabernacle of Meeting,

ii/ They were in service under the authority of Aaron and his sons.

iii/ They performed the service of the sacrifices of the altar.

iv/ They served the other tribes through the distribution of freewill offerings - particularly to the widows and the orphans.

f). The idea of service then to the people of God from within the people of God is not a NT idea – it is at the very heart of the preparation of the people of God in respect of their inheritance.

g). After all let's not forget the purpose for which God brought Israel out of Egypt, and not forget the function of the Tabernacle in respect of the fulfillment of that purpose – there was a land, an inheritance in that land, and regality within the theocratic kingdom - Ex 19:4 *'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. 5 'Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. 6 'And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'* These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

6). So as we bring this into the NT we realize that God's purpose for His people had not changed.

a). Christ came with a message of repentance to an eternally redeemed nation in relation to the heavenly portion of God's kingdom, 'the kingdom of the heavens', which was at hand.

b). This offer of the kingdom as we know was withdrawn from the nation of Israel and was then given to a new nation who would produce the fruits of it – the One New Man in Christ Jesus – the church.

c). And as we have seen in our previous weeks of study, following the Day of Pentecost, the church was empowered to re-offer the kingdom to Israel.

d). A church that began predominantly from the Jews and then became predominantly from the Gentiles as God called out a people for His name –

Ac 15:14 "Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name."

e). A church in which God began His search amongst them for a bride for His Son.

7). And we must see that it is within this context that we find the appointment of the first NT deacons.

a). The point is this – we cannot separate the ministry of the deacon from the purpose of God's plan for the church – service within the church in Jerusalem, and by extension service within Cornerstone Christian Fellowship is with an eye to the prize and participation in the race of the faith.

b). Being a deacon within this congregation is not just about seeing that everything operates smoothly, it is about an inheritance and regality in the age to come.

c). Christ Himself being the ultimate example - *Mr 10:45 "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*

8). So let's look at the events that led to the appointment of the first deacons.

9). *Ac 6:1 ¶ Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. 2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. 3 "Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; 4 "but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon,*

Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, 6 whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. 7 Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

a). Let's note some things – we see the church in Jerusalem growing in numbers, and that church being cared for both spiritually and materially.

b). The spiritual we can see in - Eph 4:11 *And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ—*

c). And the material which is inseparably connected in – Jas 2:14 ¶ *What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

d). Now in the church in Jerusalem in relation to the material needs of the people a problem had arisen over the daily distribution of food to the widows – a problem that could have caused a division between the Hebrews and the Hellenists.

e). The problem needed to be resolved, but the Apostles, although they were quite capable of serving at tables concluded that it was not desirable for them to leave the word of God to perform this task.

f). To put it simply – having care for the souls given into their charge, and knowing the outcome for the individual believer at the Judgment Seat if the salvation of that individual's soul was not accomplished, it was more important that their time should be spent in the word. In study, prayer and teaching.

g). This is not to suggest that taking care of the widows was of little importance, our scripture from James 2 shows other wise, but rather it is a question of the distribution of time and responsibility – remember the Levites within the congregation of Israel.

h). The very thing that God makes clear in another part of scripture

1Co 12:14 *For in fact the body is not one member but many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? 18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. 19 And if they were all one member, where would the body be? 20 But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. 21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.*

i). The body of Christ is made up of individuals, all of whom have a part to play within the body, and everyone's function will not be the same – contrary to the practice of most churches, one group of people is not meant to do everything.

10). And this is our experience here at Cornerstone – the church over the last two years has grown and continues to grow, and although the Elders have been more than happy to address both the spiritual and material needs we have here, we have come to a place where taking care of the material needs of the building, the resources, and the congregation is detracting from their focus on the spiritual needs.

a). For your sake, because all of us will appear at the Judgment Seat of Christ, the Elders need to spend time together in the word and in prayer.

b). Hence today those separated to the ministry of deacon.

11). Now going back to our Acts 6 scripture, I would like you to note the criteria used for the selection of deacons. They were to be men

a). Of good reputation

b). Full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom

12). Let's deal with the first – of good reputation – KJV = honest report

a). Reputation = Greek – *martureo* – from – *martus* – the word from which we get the English word 'martyr' = witness

b). I think we would find then in these men the witness in their lives of self sacrifice for the benefit of others.

c). And inevitably the choice to die to the flesh – just as Christ said Mt 16:24 ¶ *Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.*

d). The deacon then, by the witness of his life is a servant, not because he has a title.

13). And secondly, being ‘full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom’.

a). This is of paramount importance as this speaks of men who are men of the word, with a mature understanding of the coming kingdom of Christ.

b). We will remember that it is in Ephesians that we are exhorted to be filled with the Spirit - Eph 5:17 *Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be (Continually) filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, 20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

c). And that the companion scripture to this in Colossians tells us what this looks like - Col 3:16 *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*

d). Being filled with the Spirit and having the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom are one and the same thing.

e). And the word of Christ does not refer to the word in a generic sense, but specifically in relation to Christ’s past ministry as prophet, His present ministry as High Priest after the order of Aaron, and His future ministry as the great King/Priest after the order of Melchizedek – all looking to and anticipating that which is the very focus of scripture – the 7th day – the Millennial Kingdom.

f). And this of itself necessitates the study of the word, the receiving of the word and life change in response to it - Jas 1:21 *Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.*

g). And the wisdom they are to be filled with is obviously not the wisdom of this world - 1Co 2:6 ¶ *However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. 7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, 8 which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 But as it is written: Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him." 10 But God has revealed them to us*

through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

h). This is the wisdom of God, revealed by the Holy Spirit, concerning the outworking of God's plans and purposes for the ages.

i). Jas 3:13 ¶ *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.*

14 But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. 16 For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. 17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. 18 Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

13). Why is it so important for those who serve as deacons to be full of the Spirit and wisdom? Simply because their understanding of God's plans and purposes in respect of the ages and their own heavenly calling in relation to this is the motivation for their service.

a). They will understand - Col 3:23 *And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. 25 But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.*

b). They will understand - Eph 2:10 *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

i/ And that their ministry as a deacon is a good work that had been prepared for them beforehand to walk in and that this good work is wedding garment material

c). They will understand that they serve the congregation under the authority of the Elders and that in this is their safety - Heb 13:17 *Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.*

14). My beloved brethren these are such men and their wives who we present to you today – they have not come to completion, just as none of us have, but they are firmly and determinedly on the journey, with their faces set like flint towards the hope that is set before them. We are truly blessed

to have so many that are not only qualified to serve, but are ready to shoulder that responsibility.

a). And I want to pay tribute to those who at this time have felt unable to embrace this office – it is a measure of your integrity, character and maturity that you are able to do so and still express your willingness to do whatever is required of you – may God bless you, and please know that this door is not closed to you.

15). And finally, as we come to the time of ordination, let us go back to the Lord's words in - Mt 20:25 *But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. 26 "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. 27 "And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave-- 28 "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*