

# Electing Deacons

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, if we could, this evening, for the Lord's help and with the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read in the book of Acts.

In the book of Acts, chapter 6, and if we read again at verse 2. Acts chapter 6 and verse 2. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.

Now, have you ever sat in church and wondered why we do what we do? Have you ever wondered why we do certain things in a certain way?

[ 1 : 05 ] Have you ever wondered why we have particular practices and procedures? And, you know, it begs the question, do we do what we do just because it's always been done this way?

Do we do what we do because of tradition that was handed down to us by churchmen who lived centuries ago? Do we do what we do because the minister says we have to do it this way?

Do we do what we do because we want to do it this way? Or is the reason we do what we do because the Bible instructs us to do it this way?

As you know, the scriptures contained in the Old and New Testaments, they are the word of God. And the word of God, as we know, it's infallible and it's inerrant. It's without error.

It's the only rule to direct us on how we may glorify God and enjoy him forever. Therefore, what we do in church and why we do what we do in church, it must be according to the Bible.

[ 2 : 05 ] We must have a scriptural warrant for everything we do in the church of Jesus Christ. Because, well, to divert or to diverge from the word of God, it would leave us liable to error.

And so everything we do in church, the way we worship, the way we conduct ourselves, the way we live as Christians, the way we organize church government, it must all be in accordance with the teaching of the Bible.

And with that in mind, the passage which we're looking at this evening, you could say it's our scriptural warrant for electing office bearers, or more particularly, deacons. Because what we see in the opening verses of this chapter, in verses 1 to 7, what we see is the church in Jerusalem, they're gathering together for a congregational meeting.

And their purpose of the meeting is to elect deacons. And as you all know, that's why we're here this evening. We've gathered together as a congregation for a congregational meeting, with the view of electing four new deacons in the congregation.

But as we consider this passage and its relevance for us this evening, I want us to learn from what was going on in the early church at the time. Because we can see that there are four things, or there are four things that I want to draw out from these verses.

[ 3 : 23 ] Four things that were going on in the early church at the time. Because we see the church growing, the church grumbling, the church gathering, and then the church going.

The four things. So the church growing, the church grumbling, the church gathering, and the church going. So we look first of all at the church growing. The church growing.

The first few verses of verse one were told there, now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, the church was growing. Now in our study of the book of Acts, which we've just started recently on Sunday mornings, we've already seen that the church was growing quite rapidly.

Where the church membership, it started with, you could say, just 12 apostles. And then later on in Acts chapter one, we have 120 people coming to a prayer meeting.

And then on the day of Pentecost, which we were looking at just last Sunday, we saw that it was on the day of Pentecost that the Holy Spirit came upon the church and filled the church with power. [ 4 : 29 ] And there were lots of people in Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost. And it was then that Peter, he stood up to preach the gospel. And he called all these people to respond to the gospel.

Peter declared to them, he said, repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. And then we're told that those who received Peter's word, they were baptized, and they were added that day about 3,000 souls. So the church was growing.

But it didn't stop growing. Because the growth of the church, you could say it was exponential. Because in the days after Pentecost, we're told that these new converts, they devoted themselves to gathering together for teaching, for fellowship, for the breaking of bread, and for prayer. And these new converts, as they gathered together as a church, we're told that awe came upon every soul. But more than that, as they gathered together day by day, and as they shared food with one another, and as they had fellowship with one another, and worshipped together, we're told that by the end of Acts chapter 2, that the Lord added to their number, day by day, those who were being saved.

[ 5 : 51 ] The church was growing. But it didn't stop growing. Because when we go into chapters 3 and 4, Peter is still preaching to the multitudes.

Peter is still calling them to repent. He says in chapter 3, repent and turn, that your sins may be blotted out. In chapter 4, Peter reminds the multitudes who are in the hearing, he says to them, there is no other name under heaven, given among men by which we must be saved, other than the name of Jesus Christ.

And what the multitudes confessed about Peter, and all these apostles who were preaching, was that they recognised that they had been with Jesus, and they were saved. But what was wonderful was that, because of this growth in the early church, they began to care for one another.

They looked out for one another. And the church of Jesus Christ sought to help anyone who was in need. We're told at the end of chapter 4 of the book of Acts, that there was not a needy person among them.

For as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold, and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

[ 7 : 07 ] So everybody was taken care of. There was a love and a care for everyone. But of course, not everything was perfect. There were problems, and there was problems of greed, as we read in chapter 5, with this couple called Ananias and Sapphira.

But in the last verse of chapter 5, you can see there verse 42, we're told that every day in the temple, and from house to house, the church did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

Every day the church continued to preach the gospel, and every day the church continued to grow. The church was growing, but it didn't stop growing. And you know, that's what Luke, the author of this book, that's what he wants us to understand.

That when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, and when the gospel was preached faithfully and fervently, the church began to grow. And you know, that's the only way a church will ever grow. It won't grow with gimmicks or gadgets. It will only grow with the gospel. A church will only grow when the gospel is faithfully and fervently preached, and when the gospel is faithfully and fervently lived out in the lives of Christians.

[ 8 : 20 ] And so the early church, it was growing. And it didn't stop growing. But as the church grew, and as it increased in size, so did all its needs.

And that's what we see as we come to chapter 6. The church was growing, there was more and more people being added to the church, but as is always the case, when there are more people to deal with, there are also more problems to deal with.

And that's certainly what the apostle has discovered. And as the apostles were trying to deal with all the church's problems, they were being stretched to the limit. And the harder they tried to deal with all these problems, it seems that the less they achieved, and the more people grumbled.

The apostles were needing help. Because, well, as one commentator says, he says the church was experiencing growing pains. The church was only in its infancy, it had only just been born, you

could say, and it had to learn very, very quickly how to deal with all these problems that were arising.

They didn't have, like we do, we have a blue book. They didn't have a blue book with all the church practice and all the procedures written down for them just to follow. They didn't have kirk session minutes where they could look back over what happened in the past and see how the church dealt with it then.

[ 9 : 41 ] No, the early church just had to learn on their feet. Because the church was not only growing, but as we see secondly, the church was grumbling. The church was grumbling.

So that's what we see secondly. The church growing and the church grumbling. Read again in verse one. We're told, Now in these days, when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews, because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

So, you know, when we read the descriptions given of the New Testament church, we can often be tempted to think that, well, the early church was the perfect church. Because, well, as we read in the book of Acts, the gospel was being preached with faithfulness and fervency.

There were miracles happening. The people were gathering together for fellowship. They were looking out for one another. There was a hunger for God's word and the church was growing daily. And you could say it was certainly a wonderful time.

But sometimes, you know, we can look at the early church with rose-tinted glasses and think that it was the perfect church. But in reality, the early church wasn't the perfect church at all.

[ 10 : 55 ] All we have to do is read Paul's letters. His letters to all these early, all these different churches throughout the region and you see all the problems that he was dealing with.

The church wasn't a perfect church because there is no perfect church. And there never will be a perfect church until Christ comes again. I'm sure you'll remember that it was the great evangelist, Billy Graham, who said that if you find a perfect church, don't join it.

You will only spoil it. You know, there's no perfect church because the church is not a museum of good people. The church is a hospital for the broken.

And the reality is we are all broken people living broken lives in a broken world. But you know, what makes the church unique is that the gospel brings grace, goodness, and guidelines to our grumbling.

The gospel brings grace, goodness, and guidelines to our grumbling. And that's what we see here because this growing but grumbling church, it was on the verge of division.

[ 12 : 07 ] We're told that the Hellenists, they grumbled against the Hebrews. Now the Hellenists, they were Greek-speaking Jews. Well, they were Jews, but now they're Christians.

They were originally living outside of Israel, but they were probably converted on the day of Pentecost. So the Hellenists, they were Greek-speaking, but the Hebrews, they were native Jewish Christians.

They spoke Aramaic. They lived in and around Jerusalem. So the Hellenists, they were the outsiders. The Hebrews were the locals. And the Hellenists, the outsiders, they were grumbling against the local Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food.

And as we mentioned, when the church grew, so did its finances. Growth brought generosity. The freewill offerings of the people increased.

It enabled the church to provide for those who were most in need. Growth brought generosity, but growth also brought grumbling. Because the Hellenists, they were grumbling against the Hebrews.

[ 13 : 13 ] They thought that their widows were being discriminated against and neglected in this daily distribution of food. The Hellenists, the outsiders, they thought that the Hebrew widows, these locals, were being favoured.

They were being favoured more than the outside widows. And you know, as you can see so often today, when there's a language barrier or when there's a cultural barrier, even when there's a racial barrier, people are a bit more sensitive when they think that they're being discriminated against. Especially if they feel that it's the vulnerable of society that are being discriminated against, like widows. And you know, because the church was first established in Jerusalem, the majority of this growing church, they would have been locals.

They would have been Hebrews. They would have spoken Aramaic. Most of them wouldn't have been Hellenists who spoke Greek. And so, the Hellenists, they were in the minority. They were the small number in this growing church. And as the church was growing, they probably felt that they were being marginalised. They were being pushed to one side and their widows were feeling vulnerable, maybe even ignored.

[ 14 : 32 ] But you know, I don't believe that this was intentional, what was going on. Because as we see in these verses, it's very quickly rectified and resolved. But it should be a reminder to us of what can often happen in a congregation where people are unintentionally marginalised or left to one side.

And they go unnoticed. They go, as you could say, under the radar. And they're forgotten. And sadly, they drift. And they eventually maybe stop coming to church. So what do we do with them? Do we just leave them, hoping and praying that they'll come back? No. Do we talk to them, to other people about them?

No. Do we tell the minister, hoping that he'll go and see them? No. What do we do? You go yourself. You get in touch with them.

You phone them. You ask them if they're okay. You invite them to come back to church. If the Lord has put them on your heart and on your mind, then you deal with it. And you know, I'm sure that we can all think of someone, maybe tonight, we can think of someone who hasn't been to church for a while and that we should speak to.

[ 15 : 51 ] And speaking to them, it wouldn't be an invasion of privacy. Certainly not. It would be a sign that you care for them and that you have a concern for them and a concern for their soul. And if there is someone that comes to your mind, maybe you should make a point of speaking to them.

Maybe even this week, make a point of speaking to them. And so the Hellenists, they grumbled against the Hebrews because they thought that their widows were being pushed to the side. They thought that they were being discriminated and neglected in this daily distribution of food.

And the church had sought to deal with all their growing pains and their teething problems by rectifying and resolving this issue. But you know, there's one thing the church didn't do.

And we have to notice it. There's one thing the church didn't do and it was that they didn't cover up the problem and they didn't give a quick fix solution. Now the early church, and you know, we should learn from their example.

The early church saw their problems not as an obstacle, but as an opportunity. Because the obstacle of failing to distribute food to widows, failing to evenly and proportionately distribute the food between the Hellenists and the Hebrew widows, it became an opportunity.

[ 17 : 06 ] An opportunity for the church to stop and to take stock of where they're at and seek to improve upon the areas where they're lacking in order to move forward with the gospel.

And you know, that's how we should view and deal with problems that may arise in our congregation and in our church. We should see them not as an obstacle, but as an opportunity. An opportunity to do just like the early church, to stop, to take stock, to examine where we're at and seek to improve upon where we are already and move forward with the gospel.

Because the reality is if nothing is done and we just ignore the problems and we cover over the cracks and we stretch people to their absolute limit, eventually it will just all fall apart.

Which is why problems should never be seen as an obstacle, but always an opportunity. An opportunity to move forward. And also an opportunity to trust in the Lord.

And even an opportunity to trust in one another. Because if we can't trust one another, then we will want to do everything in our, we will want to do everything ourselves, which never solves a problem.

[ 18 : 21 ] And there will only be more grumbling. And so, as we consider the early church, we see the church growing. And because of that, the church started grumbling. But the church didn't view their problems as an obstacle.

It was all an opportunity. Which is why we see, thirdly, the church gathering. The church gathering. Look at verse two. It says, And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.

Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. The problem of the Hellenist widows being overlooked, it was seen by the apostles as an opportunity rather than an obstacle.

And by taking the opportunity, the apostles, they called the church to come together for what was a congregational meeting. And as the church gathered for their congregational meeting, the apostles, they state the purpose of the meeting.

And they state the problem which the congregation was facing. We're told that the apostles say in verse two, they say, It is not right that we should give up the preaching of the word of God to serve tables.

[ 19 : 37 ] Now, the apostles didn't say this because they were too proud to serve tables. It's not that they were, it's not that they thought that distributing food was below their pay grade.

And it's certainly not that the apostles thought that helping with the physical tasks of the church was a menial task. Not at all. But you know, the apostles knew.

They knew that as a church, their primary calling was the preaching of the gospel. And the apostles' greatest fear was that in focusing upon serving tables, that they were neglecting the ministry of the word and prayer.

And with this, the apostles, they're actually acknowledging, they're confessing that they can't do it all on their own. They had tried to do it. But they were trying to do too much with too little resources. And the outcome was that they had failed. They had inadvertently and unintentionally neglected valuable people in their congregation. And when we try to do too much with too little resources, we're in danger of either breakdown or burnout.

[ 20 : 51 ] You know, it was D.L. Moody, another American evangelist, he said, it is better to put ten men to work than trying to do the work of ten men.

And that's what the apostles sought to do. Because they're remedy to the problem of resources. It was resolved when the early church called a congregational meeting to elect deacons.

That's what we're told in verse 3. He says, therefore, brothers and sisters, that's what that word means. Brothers and sisters, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.

The remedy to the problem of resources was resolved by the apostles asking the congregation to elect seven deacons to serve in the congregation. Which is just what we're doing this evening.

The elders are asking the congregation, we're asking you, lovely people, we're asking you to approve the election of four deacons to serve in the congregation. But you know, there's a word that the English translation doesn't really pick up on in verse 3.

[ 22 : 02 ] And it's the word carefully. The literal translation of verse 3 is, but carefully choose out seven male witnesses full of the spirit and wisdom whom we will put in charge over this congregational need.

You know, the thing is, as a Kirk session, we have carefully and prayerfully chosen these four men because we believe that they fit the description set out here.

They are male witnesses who have been filled with the spirit of God, they are converted and they have wisdom because they fear the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom, and with your consent and approval that they'll be put in the charge of the needs of the congregation.

And you know, even though these four men may think that they're young in the faith, do you know that they were further on in the faith than the seven men who were chosen at the congregational meeting in Jerusalem?

Because we have to remember, we're only in chapter six of the book of Acts, and the church is only months old, and here they are appointing seven deacons to serve in the church, but they carefully and they prayerfully chose men to serve in the congregation.

[ 23 : 25 ] And you know, it was a wise move on the part of the apostles because as they reaffirm and even repeat in verse four, they tell the congregation that their primary calling as apostles was to prayer and the ministry of the word.

And you know, that's what the function of an elder is. The function of an elder is to pray for the congregation and to minister the word of God to the congregation, either by preaching, which is my role as the teaching elder, or by visiting, which is the role of all the elders, by fellowship, by Bible study, by evangelism.

That's the primary calling of the church and the primary calling of an elder is to pray for the congregation and to minister the word of God to the congregation.

And the reason the apostles appointed deacons and the reason we're appointing deacons is not so that the elders can take a back seat. Not at all. Because, well, as the Bible describes, the office in

the church, an office in the church is an office of service.

And service is at the root of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Therefore, the reason we're appointing deacons is to ensure that what has been maybe neglected, it needs to be addressed.

[ 24 : 44 ] And what has been lacking needs to be done better. And, you know, reading a commentary about this, it was Al Molar. He's written a brilliant commentary on this.

And he says, the apostles appointed deacons to ensure that the congregation would have its physical needs taken care of, while ensuring that they themselves would be able to continue to give focused attention to the ministry of the word so that everyone in the congregation might be spiritually nourished.

And that's what we're doing this evening. We're seeking to provide, you could say, better holistic care. Care for the congregation. Care for both body and soul.

But, you know, our meeting together should also remind us that the church is not a one-man band. It's not a one-man band. As the saying goes, there's no I in team.

But team, the word team, T-E-A-M, it's the acronym for Together Everyone Achieves More. Together Everyone Achieves More.

[ 25 : 53 ] And I must stress the everyone. Because it's not just the elders and the deacons who are to be actively serving in the congregation. Everyone is. Everyone is.

And, you know, here's another quote from Al Molar. And I find this quote very, very interesting. And very challenging. He says, Every church member should value the time that church leaders and pastors dedicate to the ministry of the word and prayer.

Indeed, he says, church members should expect nothing less from their pastor and they should encourage their pastor to spend their time investing in the word and prayer. Every church member should make it his or her goal to find ways to remove burdens from their pastor so that their pastor can invest more deeply in the study of scripture and prayer.

It's an interesting quote. But, you know, my friend, the early church had a congregational meeting to elect deacons so that the elders could devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. The desire was that there would be holistic care for the whole congregation. You know, that's what we're seeking to do this evening. But as we see here with the church growing and then the church grumbling, they dealt with their problems by the church gathering and as a result the church was going.

[ 27 : 23 ] And that's what we see lastly. Lastly and briefly, the church going. Look at verse 5. And what they said pleased the whole gathering and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip and Prochorus and Nicanor and Timon and Parmenas and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch, these they set before the apostles and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

And the word of God continued to increase and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

So those whom the church elected to be deacons, they were not only qualified because they were male witnesses and they were full of the Holy Spirit, they were full of wisdom, but you know, they also knew the people, especially the Hellenist widows.

They knew them because it's said that the majority of the men who were elected to serve in the church, they were Greek-speaking Christians. They were the outsiders. They used them to serve in the church.

They were the Hellenists. And so they knew the people and they knew how to serve the people.

And when it was at that point that they were set apart by the church for the task of being servants.

[ 28 : 44 ] That's what the word deacon means. It means servant. And although we don't know much about these seven men and their names are very hard to pronounce, but they were appointed as deacons.

And you know, it's not necessary that we know much about them because these deacons, they didn't need to make a name for themselves. They didn't need even to be seen or known except to those whom they were serving.

And you know, that's always the way it should be in the church of Jesus Christ. That when we take office in the church, it's not about status. It's not about being seen. It's all about service.

And our service, it should always be carried out silently and secretly. Because as Jesus reminds us in the Sermon on the Mount, your heavenly Father who sees in secret shall reward you openly.

So our office, it's not about status. It's not about being seen. It's all about service. And the service should be carried out silently and secretly because the Father who sees in secret shall reward openly.

[ 29 : 56 ] And you know, the reward of their service, these deacons, was that the apostles, they were enabled to devote themselves to the ministry of the word and prayer.

And it was because of that that the gospel began to spread even further. The church began to grow even more. To the point that we're told in the last verse, in verse 7, that a great many of the temple priests, they trusted in Jesus as saviour.

They became obedient to the faith. Now it's estimated that there were about 8,000 temple priests in Jerusalem at the time. And we're told in the last verse, in verse 7, that a great many of them committed their life to Jesus Christ.

So we don't know how many that was. But a great many of this 8,000. But you know, that's what it's all about. The church exists for the glory of God and the spread of the gospel.

And that's what we need to be about as a congregation. We need to exist for the glory of God and the spread of the gospel. Because our longing is that people will be saved.

[ 31 : 11 ] That people will fulfil their chief end, which is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. And for those of you who are not committed Christians here tonight, our church, our congregation exists for the glory of God and for the longing that you will confess Jesus as your Lord and Saviour.

And you know, it's safe to say we can learn a lot from the early church. Because this evening we've witnessed the church growing, the church grumbling, the church gathering and the church going.

And our prayer is that as we elect these new deacons, that our church, our congregation, will be a church that's going, going out into the highways and hedges to compel more people to come in.

That's the longing for the glory of God and the spread of the gospel. So may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, we bless thee and we praise thee that thou art a God who has a wonderful plan and a plan that is in thine hand.

And we pray that thou wouldst bless us as a congregation, that thou wouldst use us for thy glory. We realize that we are weak servants and Lord, we faint and fail.

But our testimony is that God doth fail us never, that thou art one who is faithful to us. Despite all the times that we drift from thee, we bless thee, Lord, that thou art a God who is the one who will lead us and who will guide us.

[ 32 : 47 ] So guide us, Lord, we pray. Lead us into the future, that whatever that future may hold for us, that we would always be looking to Jesus, focusing our eyes upon him because he is the captain of our salvation and he is the author and the finisher of our faith.

Lord, bless us together, we pray. Keep us, we ask. Go before us in all that we say and do, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. Amen. So we now come to what you could say the people who have been granted.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. de mi