

April 29, 2018

## “Church Government and Gospel Expression”

Acts 6:1-7

FCF: Need to see what God cares about, even through church government

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) Because of the nature of the gospel ministry,  
(magnet) local churches must pursue both the ministry of the word and the ministry of deeds.

### **SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

How far does the gospel go? Jesus said that with His coming, the kingdom of God, the rule and realm of God, was at hand. How far does that kingdom reach? Is it hemmed in by the spiritual? Does it stop at Sunday? The gospel is a message of good news. Well, how good is it?

Put another way, what does God care about? A reasonable question. I’m glad you asked. We can see that in all kinds of ways, including even in His provisions for church government.

We’re in a season of taking nominations for men to serve as elders and deacons. Last week was an introduction to the topic. This week we’re looking more specifically at the offices.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** Acts 6:1-7

### **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

### **SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Variety is the spice of life. But it can also be fuel for fire. Two groups of people, so alike but still so different. One group were “Hellenists” – Greek thinking and speaking Christians who tried to build bridges to the Greek world around them. The other group were “Hebrews” – Aramaic speaking and Jewish thinking Christians who wanted not to build bridges but barriers to keep that Greek world out. You see the potential tension here. It’s a very human thing.

By this point in the growth of the early Church, the number of Christians in Jerusalem numbered in the thousands and their meetings were taking place in private homes – likely the Hellenists and Hebrews clustering in their own groups. In such a setting, it’s not too difficult to see how one group’s needs might come to be overlooked – even unintentionally. The situation became serious enough that the apostles realized something had to change (**READ Acts 6:1-2**).

Here’s a question. Why was it “*not right*” for the apostles to “*give up preaching the word of God to serve tables?*” Keep in mind that to “serve tables” was not “waiting tables” but to carry out duties of administration. Was such work beneath them? No. It wasn’t that the needs before them were unimportant but that they knew the ministry of the word and the ministry of deeds each to be so important that something had to change. There had to be some delegation for the gospel is to impact every area of life. It has to be both declared and demonstrated. Which is to say that, because of the nature of the gospel ministry, local churches must pursue both the ministry of word and the ministry of deeds. Which is where elders and deacons come in.

Yes, I know elders and deacons are not mentioned here. But the priority, the principles, and the precedent for the office of the deacon certainly are. And, in the actions of the apostles, we see some things related to the office of elder as well. Both are vital for us to understand.

### **I. THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

We see two important ministries here. The first of these being that of the word.

### *A) The Resistance*

The word must be declared. And this ministry is so important, it faces resistance. A basic principle – sometimes you can gauge the importance of a thing by the resistance it receives.

#### 1. From within

For starters, resistance from within. Though these are the words of life and freedom we act as though they were the words of death and slavery. Christian maturity is a struggle. It doesn't come all at once. We see that in the implied uncharitable assumptions made by the Hellenists.

#### 2. From without

So resistance from within. And without. Up to this point, Satan had tried to stop this fledgling movement through persecution and corruption. Those failing, he tried a new tact – distraction, time and energy given to many good things. But not the things the apostles were called to do.

### *B) The Requirements*

The word is so important it faces resistance. Which brings us to another principle to consider. Sometimes you can gauge the importance of a thing by the resistance that it receives. And sometimes you can gauge the importance of a thing by the requirements that it demands.

#### 1. Full devotion

After all, what do we see here? Full devotion ([READ Acts 6:3-4](#)). This devotion is a steadfast and single-minded fidelity to a course of action. Why? Why such devotion to the word? For the sake of our growing maturity. And to protect the body against the infection of false teaching.

#### 2. Full dependence

How else do we see its importance? In full devotion to the word and a full dependence upon the Lord through prayer. For without the watering of prayer the seed of the word bears no fruit.

The apostles recognized they were called to this. The ministry of the word is that vital and important. So much so, there had to be delegation. And so the diaconate was formed.

#### *Illustration:*

We must be wary of being distracted. True news story from late last year ([READ quote](#)):

The city of Salzburg in Austria is implementing some [creative measures](#) to protect public safety from oblivious pedestrians staring at their smartphones... "Smartphone zombies," as they have been referred to, are a common problem in many highly trafficked areas around the world. Honolulu just signed a law that bans pedestrians from looking at their smartphones while crossing the street, thus becoming the first city in America to pass a law aimed at reducing injuries and deaths associated with distracted walking.

The KFV in Austria has a more novel way to deal with the issue of distracted pedestrians: install large airbags around street-side lampposts that urge pedestrians to stay alert. The bags serve a double purpose. They may actually protect some people from absentmindedly wandering "smack" into a lamp post. But the messaging on the airbags reinforces the need for pedestrians to stay vigilant while walking the busy streets. Roughly translated, the airbags read: *"Will the next car also be so well padded?"*

Now we may laugh at this. But it points to the danger of our becoming distracted.

#### *Application:*

There was danger that the apostles might become distracted from that which needed to be their chief focus. And that danger continues still today for elders, the shepherds of a local church. J. I. Packer said of this ([READ Packer quote](#)), *"I constantly maintain that if today's*

*quest for renewal is not, along with its other concerns, a quest for true preaching, it will prove shallow and barren.”* Packer is right and we need to hear him. The ministry of the word is so vital it needs to be pursued and protected. Which is partly why the office of deacon was created.

Because of the nature of the gospel, we must pursue both the ministry of word and the ministry of deeds. So as we consider elder and deacon nominations, we have to ask, *“Is this man convinced of this? Does he value the ministry of the word?”* For the church’s sake, he must.

## **II. THE MINISTRY OF DEEDS**

All that said, in the creation of this office, we also see the importance of the ministry of deeds. The message of the gospel needs to be declared. But it needs to be demonstrated as well.

### *A) The Resistance*

How vital, how important is this? Again, sometimes you can gauge the importance of a thing by the resistance it receives. And, again, we see resistance coming from two directions.

#### 1. From within

First, from within. Offense had been taken, perceived wrongs committed. This was a sensitive situation. So the seven chosen were Hellenists (seen in their names), all from the offended party.

#### 2. From without

Resistance from within. And resistance from without – from Satan. A collection meant to bring the church together and to demonstrate the reality of the gospel was now threatening to destroy it. This is The Screwtape Letters in living color. But the Lord stood against it (**READ Acts 6:7**).

### *B) The Requirements*

All this is to say that the importance of the ministry of deeds is reflected in the resistance that it faces. And in the requirements it demands – requirements that also come out in our text.

#### 1. Men of spiritual maturity

Want ads were not taken out (**READ Acts 6:3-5a**). The role of the deacon is a calling of the Lord with demanding qualifications – qualifications that reflect their level of responsibility and the sensitivity of the situations they will have to address. And that speaks to its importance.

#### 2. Ordination by the leadership

So too does the ordination by the leadership (**READ Acts 6:6**). In the Old Testament, the laying on of hands implied a conveyance, a transferal. We see the same in the New Testament. It was a visual expression of the apostles’ blessing, of the commissioning of the Seven to a special task, and transferal of the authority to do the job. Again, this speaks all the more to its importance.

#### 3. Authorized agents

These were to be men of spiritual maturity, ordained by the leadership of the church, serving as authorized agents of the leadership that they then might be freed to carry out their tasks. For deacons are not executives. But nor are they gophers. They are authorized agents – representing and assisting the elders of the church with an authority delegated by the elders of the church.

The point being how vital are both the ministry of the word and the ministry of deeds.

*Application:*

Which is why it wasn't "*right*" for the apostles to "*give up preaching the word of God to serve tables*" – not that the needs were unimportant but because the ministries of both the word and deeds are so important that this new office was needed. To this, Jonathan Edwards wrote (READ quote), "*I know of scarce any duty which is so much insisted on, so pressed and urged upon us, both in the Old Testament and New, as this duty of charity to the poor.*"

Because of the nature of the gospel, we must pursue both the ministry of word and the ministry of deeds. So as we consider elder and deacon nominations, we have to ask, "*Is this man convinced of this? Does he value the ministry of deeds?*" For the church's sake, he must.

**CONCLUSION:**

Back to the question: *Why was it "not right" for the apostles to "give up preaching the word of God to serve tables"?* Not because such work is insignificant but because word and deed are so significant, such vital parts of the gospel. And what God cares about. One without the other is an incomplete picture of what He cares about, of the gospel, of what He calls us to.

Let me try and illustrate this in a couple of ways. A few weeks ago, I mentioned the reboot of the old TV show, *Lost in Space*. There was another SciFi show that got its start in the mid-1960's. It was called *Star Trek*. Perhaps you've heard of it. One of the most interesting characters in the *Star Trek* franchise is Mr. Spock. Spock, being half-human and half-Vulcan, was torn between his emotional feelings and his logical reasoning. At times – like in *The Naked Time* and *All Our Yesterdays* – we see his emotional side, his giving himself to the love of a woman. At other times – like in *The Galileo 7* or *Journey to Babel* – we see his rational side, his determination to calculate and work things through in a logical fashion. Spock was a complex character with two sides. To take one without the other would be an incomplete picture.

It would be a caricature - an overplaying of one feature and the downplaying of others. I'm sure you're familiar with cartoonish caricatures, certainly in the world of politics. Think of how the presidents have been portrayed in editorial cartoons through the years - Jimmy Carter's lips, Ronald Reagan's wrinkles, Bill Clinton's nose, Barack Obama's ears, Donald Trump's hair. All of these are caricatures, clear and obvious distortions of who and what is really there.

Depending on the times and places, the culture and trends, there can be caricatures of the gospel - one element overplayed and others underplayed. I fear that in our circles we are guilty of large heads and small hearts, great orthodoxy and shrunken orthodoxy, too much thinking and too little doing. That's a caricature of the gospel - especially as you consider Jesus, his preaching the good news and his doing good works. And then His giving us both the elder and the deacon.

Back to Acts 6 and these offices, the ministries of word and deed. One without the other is an incomplete picture of what God cares about, of the gospel, of what He calls us to. Because of the nature of the gospel, we must pursue both the ministry of word and the ministry of deeds.

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) Because of the nature of the gospel ministry,

(magnet) local churches must pursue both the ministry of the word and the ministry of deeds.