

## 1 TIMOTHY 3:13

### DEACONS WHO SERVE WELL

“Those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”<sup>1</sup>

**J**esus said, “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” [MARK 10:45]. Jesus also taught His disciples, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all” [MARK 9:35]. Though being a servant is not especially esteemed in contemporary church life, servanthood is nevertheless highly regarded in the Kingdom.

As this congregation continues to grow, we will have increasing need for more deacons to serve among the congregants. The process of seeking out deacons will move along steadily. However, as we move through that appointment process, I trust we will encourage those who now serve, those who will serve and those who aspire to serve. I say this in part because we are growing; and growth brings the need to anticipate pressures we will yet face. However, my primary reason for this particular message is that in the studies we have been presenting, this verse follows that of the qualifications for deacons. I dare not pass over this particular verse, ignoring it as though it had no application to us as a community of faith.

The Apostle has provided the qualifications required for those who would serve the congregation. He has exploded the idea that deacons have a ruling role or some other administrative role within the church; he did this by including the distaff side among those who are to serve as deacons.<sup>2</sup> Paul now encourages the congregation of the Lord to esteem these individuals who serve selflessly with the assembly. Each member of the Body can encourage deacons through esteeming them for their work.

**SERVING WELL** — The word used for “serve” is nonspecific. It is possible that it refers to any Christians who serve well. In that case, it is encouragement for each believer to exercise his or her gifts wisely and to the glory of God. While this is a possible meaning of what Paul wrote, the fact that he stated this at the end of a section detailing the qualifications and service of ministers would lead quite naturally to the view that he is speaking of deacons who serve well. That is my understanding of what the Apostle wrote; and it is apparently the understanding of the translators of the Bible I use.<sup>3</sup> The words “as deacons” do not occur in the original text.

How would anyone know if a deacon served well? What criteria should be used to determine whether deacons have served well, or even whether they are serving well? It seems apparent that the Word is saying that deacons who serve well are rewarded. However, who does the rewarding and how will the congregation know whether they have served well?

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>2</sup> See, Michael Stark, “Deaconesses,” September 8, 2013, <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/clientimages/42652/sermonarchive/1%20timothy%203.11%20the%20deacons%27%20wives.pdf>; and Michael Stark, “Ministers of Mercy,” September 1, 2013, <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/clientimages/42652/sermonarchive/1%20timothy%203.08-13%20ministers%20of%20mercy.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Virtually all translations of the Bible refer to deacons in this verse. The major exceptions to this understanding by translators appear to be the **NIV** (1984 & 2011), **Today’s NIV** and **New International Readers Version**.

Well, I've asked the questions, so let's seek an answer in some semblance of order. First, how shall we assess whether deacons have served well? This raises the question of whether it lies under the purview of the congregation to determine whether deacons have served well. In order to answer the question, we need to review what the work of deacons is.

As mentioned in previous messages,<sup>4</sup> the work of deacons is not to serve as a glorified pastoral review board; the job of deacons is not that of ecclesiastical executives. Though many deacons have usurped oversight of the pulpit, warrant for such can be found neither in Scripture nor in the historical record of the churches until very recent days. During the latter part of the Twentieth Century, deacons among some evangelical groups began to assume oversight of the pastors. It is only because the pastorate began to be treated as a job, ensuring a rapid turnover of elders among the churches, that instability was introduced into the churches. To address the artificial volatility, boards began to seize control of the churches. It was out of this aberration that the unbiblical saying arose, "Pastors come and pastors go, but the church remains." It sounds rather astute, but it lacks biblical legitimacy.

Though deacons may possibly function to oversee care and maintenance of buildings and grounds, they must not be reduced to a mere property committee. While a congregation should be wise in caring for the properties God has provided, those appointed to such a committee should not necessarily bear the title of deacons. To do such is to invite the introduction of an unbiblical responsibility that can turn the deacons from their primary responsibility as outlined in the Word of God.

Moving closer to the admittedly limited revelation from Scripture of the role deacons might play, they are often portrayed as the church factotums, performing whatever job the congregation may assign. There is some justification for this position, if only because the deacons are servants of the church. A servant does not designate his or her role to those served; rather a servant is assigned a task. Since we are speaking of a spiritual role, and not a mere physical role, we dare not reduce those appointed to the diaconate to odd-job persons or personal assistants. A deacon must not be allowed to become a boy Friday or a girl Friday.

If we accept that the pericope of **ACTS 6:1-6** speaks of the first deacons, a position to which I hold, then the assignment detailed by the Apostles gives us insight into the role of deacons. Recall the words of the Twelve to the assembly: "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" [**ACTS 6:3**]. The duty to which these men were appointed was care of the widows in particular, and likely the needy, represented within the congregation. In short, these men were chosen and appointed to administer the benevolent ministries of the congregation. The requirement that they be "full of the Spirit and of wisdom" indicates the spiritual quality of the work they would perform. Therefore, adopting the term suggested by one writer, I speak of them as "Ministers of Mercy."<sup>5</sup>

A review of the history of this primitive congregation will no doubt prove beneficial. Recall a statement made of congregational ministry shortly after Pentecost. "And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need" [**ACTS 2:44, 45**].

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<sup>4</sup> See Michael Stark, "Ministers of Mercy," September 1, 2013, <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/clientimages/42652/sermonarchive/1%20timothy%203.08-13%20ministers%20of%20mercy.pdf>; Michael Stark, "Deacons? Who Needs Them?", September 15, 2013, <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/clientimages/42652/sermonarchive/acts%2006.01-06%20where%20shall%20we%20find%20deacons.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Alexander Strauch, **Ministers of Mercy: The New Testament Deacon** (Lewis & Roth Publishers, Littleton, CO 1992, 1994)

What began at Pentecost continued for a long while afterwards. “The full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 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” [ACTS 4:32-35].

I am ashamed to contrast the attitude of these Jewish Followers of The Way with the professed people of God in this day. In far too many churches, care of the needy and the vulnerable is not merely neglected, it is discouraged. I don’t mean to imply that we must throw money at every presumed need of which we become aware, for that would be foolish in the extreme. However, practical theology would insist that we need to invest love in one another. Our generosity should be common knowledge among the denizens of this fallen world, and not merely because we impoverish ourselves for the sake of the slothful. However, when I read, “There was not a needy person among them,” I realise that we have a long way to go before we have reached the model provided in the Word. The generosity witnessed is noteworthy precisely because the redistribution of money was not the focus; rather, it those uniting in the Body invested in one another. Underscore this concept in your mind.

The action of providing for the needy was motivated by love, just as anticipated by the Master Himself: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” [JOHN 15:12, 13]. I suggest that we modern Christians have failed the test of love in far too many instances. We do a good job of accumulating goods, even giving praise to God because He provides richly. However, we have some room to grow in love before we dare boast of our commitment to His teaching. The motive behind love that costs nothing should be questioned.

Perhaps the generosity of heart witnessed in this early church was a practical response to Jesus’ instructions given to a rich young man on one occasion. You will recall that this rich young man had come to Jesus because he felt a deficit in his heart. He spoke of his care in adhering to the commandments of God, and then asked, “What do I still lack” [MATTHEW 19:20]? You will no doubt remember Jesus’ answer to this plea, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” [MATTHEW 19:21]. I have no reason to believe that the first disciples were unaware of Jesus’ teachings; oral tradition would have ensured that His pithy sayings were communicated from the first days of the Faith.

The love and unity witnessed in this early congregation was nothing less than a literal fulfilment of the Master’s teaching. “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” [LUKE 12:32-34].

I’ve said these things, not because I doubt the generosity of this congregation—you are exceptional in your generosity; however, our lack of provision for administering the gifts of God’s people, assuming that the elders will care for the distribution, demonstrates a need of which we are not even aware. We need to begin the process of seeking out individuals to provide oversight of the benevolent ministries of the church. It is time to cease conducting these ministries on an ad hoc or provisional basis.

Those chosen to serve as deacons will be adjudged by whether they demonstrate compassion and exhibit love toward God's holy people. The judgement will be ongoing throughout their tenure. Their labours will be assessed by whether they are conscientious in administering the benevolence of God's people without partiality and without prejudice. Again, this judgement will be continual throughout the days of their service. Whether the deacons of the church will receive commendation from Him who equips for service will be determined by their commitment to Him and by their commitment to this office. Whether they are recognised by the assembly will be dependent upon their faithful labours.

Though we have partially answered the question, I will raise the matter again to ensure clarity—who does the rewarding of deacons who serve well? To be certain, each Christian is responsible to anticipate appearing before the Judgement Seat of Christ the Lord. There, each of us longs to hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant” [MATTHEW 25:21, 23]. Generosity and benevolence is not the purview of deacons only; this is the responsibility of each believer. Paul asserted to the Elders of Ephesus, “You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” [ACTS 20:34, 35]. Let those words sink in: “In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” We—each follower of the Risen Saviour—we *must* help the weak.

On another occasion, when fellow believers were suffering during a time of drought, we read of the first believers, “The disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul” [ACTS 11:29, 30].

Surely, an example to all Christians is that provided by the Macedonian saints when they were informed of a need among the believers in Achaia. “We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us” [2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-5].

What we are to demonstrate individually, we are also to demonstrate collectively. The difference is that as a congregation, our labours are to be co-ordinated and administered by deacons—Ministers of Mercy appointed to oversee the benevolence of the community of faith. The first priority of the assembly is to their own people. I don't want to leave the impression that as a congregation we are to be concerned exclusively for the welfare of our own membership; the deacons are appointed to provide relief for those who are part of the Body as their first priority. As the congregation's mercy ministers, they are appointed to manage relief for the assembly's members who are vulnerable and in need.

In light of all that I have said, it should be obvious that it is the congregation that chooses and the elders who appoint to the diaconate who reward deacons through recognition of faithful service. Those who serve well—who serve faithfully, conscientiously, honourably, are to be commended and esteemed in love because of their service to God's holy people. Those who receive the benevolence of the mercy ministers are to bless God, asking that He richly reward those who serve well among the saints.

Just as those who received the gifts of the Christians of Achaia glorified God, so those who receive the ministrations of the deacons of this congregation will glorify God. “He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you” [2 CORINTHIANS 9:10-14].

There is a bit of bookkeeping that must be addressed, especially in light of a common practise among the churches of our Master. Many congregations elect deacons annually; for these churches, the diaconate is merely an elective office that fulfils an organisation need. The construction of Paul’s statement points to the length of time in which a deacon serves as such.<sup>6</sup> In simplest terms, a deacon is appointed—there is no need for reappointment, neither is there a leave of absence. As deacons serve, faithfully fulfilling the trust extended by the congregation, they reap a rich reward. This is a present tense verb, indicating that the reward received is ongoing. It is in the actual performance of the duties assigned that deacons are rewarded.

**A GOOD STANDING** — “Those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves.” Deacons who have served well throughout their tenure are to be held in honour by the congregation that appoints them. When I read Paul’s encouragement to the Thessalonians, I note a truth that is too often overlooked. “We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves” [1 THESSALONIANS 5:12, 13].

Throughout the New Testament, especially from the time of the appointment of the first deacons, there are two broad and distinct categories of ministry appointed among the saints. These ministries are not in competition; rather, they complement one another. Neither are they to be thought exclusive, as though an individual engaged in one cannot be engaged in the other. I am speaking of the ministry of “word” and that of “deeds.” As examples of this dichotomy of ministry, consider a couple of passages from the Word. Paul cautioned the Christians in Rome, “I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed” [ROMANS 15:18]. Paul was both a herald of the Word and a servant of God; thus, his statement that he laboured by Word and deed.

Again, to the Colossian saints, he writes, “Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” [COLOSSIANS 3:17]. Whether in word or deed, Christians are to serve to the glory of Christ the Lord, seeking His honour.

In the passage in Acts which speaks of the appointment of the first deacons, Luke speaks of the same terms, speaking of “the ministry of the Word” [VERSE FOUR] and “serv[ing] tables” [VERSE TWO]. The Apostle Peter defines these two concepts as speaking and serving. “Whoever speaks, [let him speak] as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” [1 PETER 4:11]. Whether speaking or serving, God is the source of power and the One who receives glory from what is done.

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<sup>6</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, **First Timothy, Everyman’s Bible Commentary** (Moody Press, Chicago, IL 1957) 71

It is possible for one to be strong both in word and in deed, though it seems to be the exception rather than the rule. The earliest disciples understood that Jesus was mighty in word and deed. Two disciples explaining their sorrow to the Risen Master spoke to Him of, “Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people” [LUKE 24:19]. At that time, this was the assessment of Jesus given by these two disciples. Delivering his apologia, Stephan said Moses was, “mighty in his words and deeds” [ACTS 7:22]. However, most of us are stronger in one area or the other.

Those who are gifted so that they are stronger in word gravitate to teaching, preaching, writing, counselling, pastoring or in depth study in the Word.<sup>7</sup> As an example of an individual who was strong in the Word, think of Apollos. Luke describes Apollos as “An eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus... He powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus” [ACTS 18:24b, 25a, 28].

Contrast that category of serving among the churches through the ministry of the Word to Christians gifted so that they are strong in deeds. Individuals thus gifted tend to serve as administrators, organisers, doers, helpers, supporters, builders, ministers of mercy and givers. Among those identified in Scripture as strong in deed, one could name a number of individuals recognised because of their service to Christ and His people. Each of the individuals named in the Word was singled out for recognition because of their service to others, and not for their ability to speak.

Follow that line of thought through the passages that speak of individuals noted for serving. To the Corinthians, Paul wrote, “You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints—be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and labourer” [1 CORINTHIANS 16:15, 16].

The Apostle also names another man as recognised for serving the needs of the saints. “May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me—may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day!—and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus” [2 TIMOTHY 1:16-18]. We can only guess at what service Onesiphorus may have rendered to the imprisoned Apostle.

Paul also commends Phoebe, a deaconess, as he draws to a conclusion the Letter to Romans Christians, “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae” [ROMANS 16:1]. The reader is left with the impression that this gifted woman had faithfully served the church at Cenchreae, and now she was travelling to Rome, perhaps carrying the letter we know as Romans, and the Apostle wants the people to know her heart. She is a deaconess, a servant of the congregation meeting in Cenchreae. As such, she merits the Apostles commendation. We know little else of her, but this says a lot.

There is another instance of an individual recognised for his service to the Apostle. This individual was a slave, one without any rights in the ancient world. In fact, he could be killed by his master and there would be no repercussions to the owner. This man’s name was Onesimus, a name that if translated into English, would be rendered “Useful.” Paul will make a play on his name. “I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel” [PHILEMON 10-13].

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<sup>7</sup> For further insight into these broad categories of ministry to the saints, consult, Strauch, op. cit., 30-1

There are also a number of women recognised for their service to Jesus Himself. Doctor Luke writes of these women in his Gospel. “Soon afterward [Jesus] went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means” [LUKE 8:1-3].

Writing of a man named Onesiphorus, Paul testifies, “When he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me—may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day!—and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus” [2 TIMOTHY 1:17, 18].

The point is that throughout the New Testament we are introduced to individuals recognised for their service—they are doers, acting out of love to advance the cause of Christ. From such pools of gifted men and women, the churches may propose individuals who will serve the assembly as deacons. These individuals that conduct ministries of deeds are functioning, whether with the title or without the title, in a similar capacity as deacons. The primary difference will be that the deacons are specifically appointed to serve as mercy ministers.

These individuals whom I have named were recognised for their service. In a similar fashion, deacons who serve well gain a good standing for themselves among the saints whom they serve. The deacons do not seek recognition, but those whom they serve recognise them because of their selfless and loving service. The deacons do not serve in order to be recognised, but they are worthy of recognition by the saints whom they serve. Those who serve in humility will be exalted by God and by the churches they serve. The intent of this statement appears to be that deacons who serve well enjoy influence and reputation within their own congregation. Though a deacon cannot be said to wield the bishop’s staff as does an elder, he will have an excellent standing before the people, with authority that goes far beyond his words.

Both James and Peter speak of recognition from God. “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you” [JAMES 4:10]. Again, Peter writes, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you” [1 PETER 5:6]. Just as the Father recognises faithful service, so the churches are taught to recognise such service also. Recall this admonition to the Christians in Thessalonica. “We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work” [1 THESSALONIANS 5:12-13]. For this reason deacons are to be proven blameless; they must also be dignified [see 1 TIMOTHY 3:8-10].

The lives of elders and the faith by which they live are to be imitated [see HEBREWS 13:7]. These godly men are to live among the flock in such a way that their walk is emulated by those whom they serve. The Apostle would urge the Corinthians to follow his example with this plea, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” [1 CORINTHIANS 11:1]. Similarly, every elder must so live that he can with a clear conscience urge those who listen to his message to imitate his life, lending credence to the command through a life imitating Christ. Likewise, deacons are promised that through faithful, loving service, they may anticipate the respect and love of those whom they serve. They will have authority—authority not borne of a title, but authority established by and growing out of a life revealing divine love and righteous service to the saints.

Timothy was to attend to responsibilities imposed on him as an elder in such a manner “that all may see your progress” [1 TIMOTHY 4:15b]. In doing this, he would lead his flock toward salvation. The godly deacon serving the flock of God, revealing the mercy and compassion of the Master Himself, enjoys a similar influence of those he or she serves.

**GREAT CONFIDENCE IN THE FAITH** — “Those who serve well as deacons gain ... great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.” Serving well in the past builds confidence for serving well in the future. Elders are supposed to have a thorough grasp of Christian doctrine before they are set apart to that ministry. Deacons “must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” [1 TIMOTHY 3:9]. They may not have as thorough a grasp of the Faith, but they must have a solid understanding of essential Christian truth—this is not a place for equivocation. What is promised, however, is that they will gain “great confidence in the Faith” through serving well. Serving well generates boldness in the Faith of Christ the Lord; this is the promise of God.

Among the deacons chosen and presented to the Twelve was a man named Philip, “Lover of Horses.” At this point, all we know of Philip is that he was full of the Spirit and of wisdom [see ACTS 6:3]. We cannot say with certainty how long he served the Jerusalem congregation, but when Saul of Tarsus invaded the comfortable realm of the church, Philip fled along with the remainder of the congregation. This scattering was not an inconsequential event. The congregation may have number as many as 100,000 souls, and assuredly no less than 20,000 saints were included in the church at the time of this dispersal.

We pick up the tale of Philip, however, in the very next chapter of the book. “Those who were scattered [by the persecution of Saul] went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city” [ACTS 8:4-8].

He is demonstrating what can only be said to be great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. He was instrumental in turning many people to the Faith, baptising them into the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit [see ACTS 8:12]. Moreover, his ministry in the Word was accompanied by “signs and great miracles” [see ACTS 8:13]. Clearly, Philip is not limiting himself to the ministry of deeds. He has gained boldness in the Faith. And God was not finished just because he had conducted a great evangelistic campaign in Samaria.

Philip was directed by an angel of the Lord to travel down to a desert area [see ACTS 8:26]. What is amazing about this account is that without protest, Philip does as commanded. There, he was to have an encounter with one man—one very important man. Here is the account. “There was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go over and join this chariot.’ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ And he said, ‘How can I, unless someone guides me?’ And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:

‘Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter  
and like a lamb before its shearer is silent,  
so he opens not his mouth.  
In his humiliation justice was denied him.  
Who can describe his generation?’  
For his life is taken away from the earth.”



“And the eunuch said to Philip, ‘About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?’ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?’ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him” [ACTS 8:27-38].

When we last see Philip, he is identified as “Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven” [ACTS 21:8]. That boldness, that confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus, has impelled him to dare great things for God. I suggest that his confidence and boldness grew out of his serving well as a deacon among the saints of God.

I suggest that this is great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. I suggest that Philip is demonstrating precisely what Paul is writing of—this is a bold witness for Christ. In the same way, deacons who serve well may anticipate great boldness in the Faith. They will have walked with the Master and therefore will know His pace. They will know His heart because they have responded to the impulse of the Spirit to serve His people.

Jesus is always concerned about service to His people. Looking forward to those awful days following the Tribulation period when Jesus shall have returned to judge the nations, He will gather all mankind before Him. Some, I fear few coming out of those terrible days of the Tribulation, will be commended. On what basis are they commended? “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me’” [MATTHEW 25:31-40].

The heart of the Master is revealed in the commendation he delivers to those on his right! “As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.” Is compassion for His own any less of a burden to the Master today? Does He care less for those who are vulnerable among His saints now than He will care for those of that day? Indeed, He has compassion for the weak and for the vulnerable; and He has instructed the churches that they are to appoint deacons to serve His people, revealing His compassion and His love through service rendered on behalf of the churches.

I tremble when I think of the sentence delivered to those standing on the Master’s left. “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” [MATTHEW 25:41]. Their lack of compassion, their decision to focus on their own needs and comfort, testify that they never knew neither the compassion of the Master nor the love of the Father. Therefore, they are condemned by their lives. They lacked faith, and their lives testified against them. How many of the professed churches of this day could stand under such scrutiny? When buildings and personal comfort and the accumulation of goods are of greater importance than is caring for God’s holy people, how can such people say the love of God is in them?

It is a truism of warfare that sergeants win battles; officers win medals. An officer in battle would be very foolish not to solicit and consider the advice of a first sergeant. Similarly, because the deacons are in touch with the needs of the people, they are battling on the front lines of the spiritual conflict. Elders will do well to listen to the concerns and the reports coming from the deacons; and the deacons must communicate with the elders. Together, they ensure a healthy congregation and a strong and vibrant advance of the Faith.

Through Paul's letter, the Spirit of God has set a high standard for those who would serve as deacons. The connective Paul uses gives us the reason the standard is so high. To be certain, the deacon does represent the church he or she serves. Therefore, no one should approach the position of serving in a casual or cavalier manner. The congregation must take seriously the choice of those who will serve. The deacon serves in Christ's stead; he or she must not be swayed as though occupying a position of power. The deacon is a servant, and his or her conduct reflects on Christ the Lord. Let the deacon consider carefully the manner in which service is offered and the manner in which life is lived.

We will move with deliberation toward the appointment of deacons with the expectation that when these gifted individuals are sought out, the congregation will prosper, the cause of Christ will be strengthened and the Kingdom of God will advance in power. May God direct His people in His paths until He comes. Amen.