

Acts 6.1-7
18 April 2010 AM

Beloved, God-willing in June, we will be electing two deacons into the office of deacon. And the purpose of this sermon is to call attention to your solemn responsibility to search out godly men, filled with the Holy Ghost to consider this office. The apostle Paul says that if a man desires the office of a bishop he desires a good work. What he says about the bishop can also be rightly said of the office of deacon. It is a glorious calling and work. It is no lesser in significance to the office of a minister or elder. Surely, deacons are God's gift to the church.

Before our Lord ascended into heaven, he said to the disciples that they will receive power after the Holy Ghost will upon them and they will be witnesses of Him in Jerusalem, Judea, in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And in obedience to their Lord, the disciples were busy preaching and thousands came to believe in Jesus Christ, who died for the sins of his people and rose again from the dead. And as a result, a new situation has arisen in the life of the church, where the certain widows were neglected which gave the reason of a new office to be instituted. And as a result, seven men were elected into the office of deacon. This represents a turning point and a permanent change in the instituted life of the church so that today we have deacons in the church. But, could not the apostles do the work of ministering to the widows instead of instituting a new office. To that the apostles said, "it is not reason that we leave the Word of God and serve tables", which is the reason why the apostles gave the exhortation, "look ye out among you, seven men of honest report".

The theme is LOOKYE OUT AMONG YOU. First, the urgent need. Secondly, the qualifications needed. Thirdly, the glorious result.

The Urgent Need. There arose a murmuring within the congregation. The Grecians or the Greek speaking Jews was complaining because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration of food. At that time in Jerusalem there were two kinds of Jews: there were those who spoke Greek and those who spoke Hebrew or Aramaic. From where did the Greek speaking Jews come? In fact, they came from Palestine, which was invaded by the great Persian conqueror, Alexander the Great. And part of his aim in conquering the world was to Hellenise the whole world by bringing in Greek language and culture. And the Jews in Palestine were forced to acquire the Greek language, which was the common language of then known world, just like English language today. The Hebrews or the Aramaic speaking Jews was also from Palestine and they retained their Hebrew language. How was it that the Greek speaking widows were neglected in the daily ministration of food? First, the number of the disciples increased through the preaching of the apostles. For example, at the preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost, three thousand souls were saved. And at the temple, five thousand souls were saved. And in all, about eight thousand souls were saved within the space of one day! And with it, also came the great increase in the number of the widows of the congregation. And thus, those who would be distributing food could not cope with the increased in numbers and therefore, led to the neglect of the Grecian widows.

The complaint was directed against the Hebrews. Their complaint came in the form of murmuring, whispering in an unhappy and dissatisfied manner. Being left out of the daily ministration of food was serious. These widows were very poor and they depended totally upon the daily distribution of food so that they could go about in their daily work of feeding the cattle, fetching water, without feeling the hunger pangs

in their stomachs. They must have also been angry because they have been unjustly bypassed, when the Hebrews continued to receive their share of daily food.

And when the disciples heard of this neglect of the Grecian widows, the apostles dealt with it immediately. And they said, "it is not reason for us to leave the word of God and serve tables". And this is the whole point of this passage. The apostles' one calling was to fulfill the great commission of Jesus Christ to preach the good news of salvation and engage in prayer. And they ought not to allow other concerns to cause them to neglect their calling to preach the gospel. In fact, it is not reason or right for them to neglect their calling. This is because Christ has called them to preach the gospel. And to neglect it is to be disobedient and unfaithful in that call of Christ. And as such, the apostles gave the command, "look ye out among you, seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom". Why "seven"? In Scripture, the number "seven" is a perfect number and thus it represents what is needed to meet the needs of these widows. The congregation needed seven men. One thing that must impress us is that at the heart of this command is the love of God for the poor. In spite of the march of the apostles to preach the gospel, the poor cannot be neglected, and that they be continued to be ministered. The poor too are the people of God and ought not to be neglected. Together with the Hebrews, the Grecians too have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. God sends His Son to die for these widows. And for them, Christ rose again and is ascended into heaven. Whether they are rich or poor, Jews of different ethnic background, Chinese or Indian, male or female are bought by the blood of Christ.

Therefore, sensing our need in CERC for deacons, the session calls you "to look ye out among you". Though we do not have widows who are neglected, there are real needs in the congregation. There are definitely the poor in the congregation that needs to be ministered to. The term of our only deacon in June and CERC ought not to have no deacons to minister to the poor. If CERC fails to elect two deacons into office, then, two elders must serve as deacons. We hope to elect two deacons to restore the plurality of the diaconate. For a few years now, we have only one deacon. And this makes the work of the diaconate difficult as no man should do the work of the diaconate alone but he needs the decision of the diaconate to properly do the work. And because of this lack, an elder serves as an assistant deacon.

Beloved, survey the entire congregation especially the male members of the congregation. If you are not sure who are the male members, then look into the church directory. Do not look for someone to be the church's office boy or an administrator but pick out men who are godly with spiritual qualifications. What are the qualifications to serve in the office? The passage mentions three.

The Qualifications needed.

Firstly, he is a man of honest report. This refers to good reputation. The word, "report" comes from the Greek word, *martureo* which means a martyr or witness. And so this means that he is well spoken of or one who receives approval, as in I Tim. 3.7. He is well spoken of in terms of his character and godliness. This is important lest he falls from the attacks of the devil because of his bad reputation from those outside the church. Having a good reputation in this instance would mean that he lives out of his Christian life, e.g. in the church, at home, in school, in the office or on the factory. Young Timothy was an example of one who had a good reputation. He was highly recommended to the apostle Paul by the brethren at Lystra and Iconium. And the apostle took him on his missionary journeys. And the apostle took him on his missionary journeys. Are you one who has a good reputation of godliness? Do you desire to be like young Timothy?

The second qualification is that he is filled with the Holy Ghost and wisdom. To be filled with the Spirit does not refer to be able to speak in tongues, but rather one who manifests God's grace in his life, which is a sign that he has new spiritual life implanted there by the Holy Spirit. And this grace is evident in his knowledge of God and his attitude towards Scriptures. Closely related to his is that he holds the mystery in a pure conscience, which is one of the qualification of a deacon in I Tim. 3.9, Negatively, we must never think that it is not necessary for him to be doctrinally sound in the Reformed Faith, nor is it enough that he does not believe in any error. But, rather, it must be positively evident that he is thoroughly Reformed according to the Three Forms of Unity. And he is willing to defend these truths against false doctrines. He must be standing on the distinctives doctrine of the CERC. That the marriage bond is for life and only death, not divorce breaks the bond. And when you remarry if your divorced spouse is still living, you will be guilty of adultery. And thus, it is unlawful for an innocent party to remarry, for that is adultery. And since he is filled with the Holy Spirit, he is also holy. Holiness has two aspects: he hates all sin that defiles his soul and he is completely devoted to God. He is one who walks in good conscience before God, walking in the fear of God all the days in his life. The third qualification that he is filled with wisdom. This refers to the wisdom of God. And the beginning of it is to depart from evil and the ability to apply the Word of God in his office. He must be wise in the performing of his calling. Firstly, he needs wisdom to distribute the alms to the poor after collecting it. Wisdom to know who are the truly poor through thorough investigation. Wisdom to ensure that the alms are not misused. Secondly, he needs wisdom to carry out the work of the office in a way that God's people know and experience the mercy of God through the work of the diaconate, for after all, the diaconate is a ministry of mercy. And when God's people receive the benevolence, they know that it is given to them by Christ himself. who shows pity to God's people in the way of the forgiveness of sins and as the high priest who is sympathetic to their continual sorrows.

And the glorious result of looking out for men of honest report, who are filled with the holy ghost and wisdom is that the seven men were ordained into the office of the deacons. That took place that towards the proposal of the apostles that seven men of honest report were found, that the congregation chose the seven. Here their choosing refers to the process of voting. And the seven men were the first deacons in the church of Jesus Christ. And the congregation presented the seven before the apostles, and the apostles prayer over them and laid their hands upon them. This means that that they were ordained into the office of deacons and set apart for the work. And henceforth, these seven has the office and they are to discharge the office faithfully in the name of Christ. This process of setting apart men for the office in the way of laying on off hands ought to continue in the church. This is biblical. And by this the office –bearer can recall the days that he has been ordained into the office with great encouragement and strength. And in days of great discouragement and there are many, he can be assured that it is Christ who called him into office. And with the ordination of the first deacons in the church at Jerusalem, the New Testament church will continue to have the office of deacon. And so we must continue to have this office in CERC. And we must not allow this office to die off. And the result of this ordination is that the Word of God increased. The apostles could continue in their work of the ministry of prayer and the Word. And the ministry of the word increased and multiplied when the apostles went everywhere preaching the Word of God and was not hindered by other works which were not theirs. And even led to the salvation of many priests who obeyed the faith. They embraced Christ and all truths concerning Christ and they obeyed the Word of God. Who were the priests? They are those who initially opposed the ministry of the apostles. In Acts 4.1, these priests were grieved that at the preaching of the apostles, who preached the

resurrection of Christ and therefore, put them in prisons. The priests obedience to the faith was realised through the apostles' ministry of the Word, the ordination of the deacons and the deacons ministering to the neglected widows and the great love of God for the widows. Amen.