

Deacons

by Anton Bosch

Deacons are a specific ministry within the church, responsible for helping with various tasks, such as administrative work, so that the preachers can focus on their ministry.

Duration: 46:50

Scripture: Acts 6:1

Topics: "Deacons"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the role of deacons in the church. He emphasizes that being a deacon is a lifelong commitment until God calls them to another ministry or to heaven. The speaker then delves into Romans chapter 16, specifically focusing on Phoebe, who is described as a servant of the church in St.Crea. He explains that the term 'servant' in this context refers to a specific ministry of helping and supporting others in the church. The speaker also highlights the importance of selecting and appointing deacons through the hands of the apostles and the involvement of the congregation.

Transcript

Acts chapter 6, Acts chapter 6. I want to speak with you this evening about deacons. We spoke about elders in the last two sessions and this evening we speak about deacons. Now when we read from Acts chapter 6, these men are not expressly called deacons here in this passage or anywhere else, but we deduce and theologians are divided as to whether they were deacons or were not deacons.

I believe that they were deacons, that they were the first seven deacons that were appointed and I have various reasons for that and if you want to know the technical reasons then you can read it in the paper. And so I do believe that these men were the first deacons and they are, this is an important passage because it gives us a lot of information about the operation of deacons which we don't have elsewhere. Acts chapter 6 verse 1. Now in those days when the number of the disciples was multiplying there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists or the Greeks because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.

Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said it is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Chapter 6 verse 3. Therefore brethren seek out from among you seven men of good reputation full of the holy spirit and wisdom whom we may appoint over this business but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude and they chose Stephen a man of full of faith and the holy spirit and Philip, Brachorus, Nicanor,

Timon, Paramanus and Nicholas a proselyte from Antioch whom they set before the apostles and when they had prayed they laid hands on them.

Then the word of God spread and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem and the great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. Now if we keep your finger there because we'll come back there let's go to the book of Timothy 1 Timothy chapter 3. 1 Timothy chapter 3 and 1 Timothy 3 contains the qualifications for elders or overseers as we looked at last week but it also contains the qualifications for deacons 1 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 8. Likewise deacons must be reverent not double-tongued not given too much wine not greedy for money holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience but let these first be tested then let them serve as deacons being found blameless. Likewise their wives must be reverent not slanderers temperate faithful in all things let deacons be the husband of one wife ruling their children and their own houses well for those who serve well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

And so here we have the word deacon the word deacon in the greek is translated or transliterated from the greek diakonos so it's just been anglicized so that we have the word deacon it appears many times in the new testament but the word literally means a servant somebody who serves at tables it is particularly in classical greek connected to those who serve tables like a waitress or a waiter but it is generally used of a servant now in the new testament there are times most of the time when this word appears in the new testament it is used in the general sense of a servant and it is translated into the english by the word servant but there are a few times when the word is translated when the word refers not to general because we're all servants of the lord we all should be servants of

one another but there are those who are specifically called to the missionary or to the to the mission or the purpose or the ministry of the deacon the office of a deacon i don't like that word office but it does describe so it's a it's a it's a job ministry within the church of deacon and the word is sometimes when it refers to those people who hold that position the word is translated deacon in the in the english new new testament so you have the same greek word and only the context will tell you whether he is referring to servants in general or deacons in particular same word and there is one particular incident which we'll come back to in romans chapter 16 where the word is translated servant when in fact it probably should be translated deacon so it's a very difficult word to deal

with from that point of view it's an easy word to understand it literally means a servant but there are times when it means a servant in general there are times when it means a deacon in the sense of somebody who has the job of a deacon in the local church now here clearly he is he is referring to somebody who has this particular function um here in in one timothy chapter three because he speaks about a bishop or an elder and then he says the deacons now obviously he's not meaning everybody everybody is a servant but he's obviously not speaking here of a special group of people who have the specific ministry of a deacon and um if we go to the book of philippians and we'll come back to timothy but in philippians chapter one and verse one paul and timothy bond servants of jesus christ to

all the saints in christ jesus who are in philippi with the bishops and deacons the elders and the deacons so he's addressing the church with the elders and the deacons so you can see that they are a clearly defined group of men or people who are those who are the elders and those who are the deacons and they obviously have a ministry and so they are addressed as the leaders of the church now what then is the the function of a deacon because again we have a problem with the language because in some churches deacons are the fulfill the responsibility of elders what the scripture would refer to as elders i

think many baptist churches are run by deacons uh or the deaconate or the deacons board um and they really are fulfilling the responsibility of elders that the bible describes as elders

um and so we have a problem with the uh with with the the language again the way that we use that that uh that word in english now the the name of the the title tells us what these people are they are servants but they are servants in a specific way not in the sense that we are all servants we should all be serving one another we should all be helping one another we should all be helping the church we should all be helping those who are in leadership in the church but some are called specifically to this ministry of helping now when you go to timothy and one timothy chapter three again and we're going to go back and forth between these scriptures in timothy and in ephesians essentially sorry in in acts act six and one timothy chapter three when you look at the list of the qualifications

here and i'm not dealing with qualifications but i want to highlight something and that is that you'll see that one of the things that an elder must be able to do is in verse two they must be able to teach able to teach but when you come to the list of the qualifications of the deacons which is almost the identical list to that of the elders but it does not include the ability to teach so what you're looking at are two men who are the same in terms of their qualifications in terms of their fact that they are blameless that they are not double-tongued that they are not greedy for money all of these things the qualifications are almost identical for the two the difference is that one is able to teach and the other one is not required to be able to teach that does not mean that deacons are

not involved in spiritual ministry at all when you look at acts chapter six you'll find that the two first two men that are named were stephen and philip stephen was a preacher and he was the first martyr and he died because of the message which he preached he was a very able preacher philip was an evangelist he is named philip the evangelist and so at least two of those seven men had a preaching ministry whether that ministry came a little bit later than they became deacons or whether it ran at the same time that we're not sure and doesn't really matter but the fact is that there is there is deacons are and may be and can be involved in spiritual ministry but it is not their prime focus go back to acts chapter six because in this we we get really the a summary of of what it's about

and the issue was between the greek and the hebrew widows and obviously they had a feeding scheme and they were feeding them and there was a dispute because the greek women were saying that we don't get a fair share and so the 12 in verse 2 that obviously the apostles summoned the multitude of the disciples and said it is not desirable that we should leave the word of god and serve tables now there is nothing wrong with serving tables and i don't want anyone to go from here this evening with this impression that a deacon's ministry is inferior to an elder's ministry as we've said before no ministry is inferior to any other ministry no ministry is superior or more important than any other ministry all ministries are important all ministries are necessary but at the same time there are very

there are not that many who are called and gifted to teach and to preach the word every one of us if we apply ourselves can be a good deacon i'm sure of that but not everyone can be a preacher i'm sure of that also and so the emphasis here is that if god has called certain brothers to teach or preach the word it is not right that they neglect the teaching or the preaching of the word and prayer those two things go together the word of god to serve tables and you'll see further down it says but we verse four will give ourselves we'll appoint them over this business verse three verse four but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word so the function of deacons then in this context is to relieve the preachers of the day-to-day affairs in this particular

case of feeding the women of running the benevolent scheme of the church so that the preachers can get on with their business of praying and preaching that is the essential function of a deacon it is there to help those who are preaching so that they don't have to neglect their preaching and their praying in order to do administrative things day-to-day tasks that is the situation where we're at in this church preaching is a minor add-on to my ministry in this church i spend all my time running administration fixing things doing day-to-day tasks i have not enough time to pray i do not have enough time to study the word most of the time i get into the pulpit and i say this quite bluntly with less than one hour's preparation that's all i have it's not right but that's the way it is that was

the problem these guys had that is the problem many churches have and so the function of the deacons is to relieve those who should be spending their time focused on the word and on prayer of the responsibilities and the burden of doing things that everybody else can do but as we said not everybody else can preach and so in 1 corinthians chapter 12 we have another insight into this ministry and this verse is not very clear simply because it doesn't refer directly to deacons and elders but it does contain a list of ministries 1 corinthians chapter 12 and verse 28 and god has appointed these in the church 1 corinthians 12 28 god has appointed these in the church first apostles second prophets third teachers after that miracles then gifts of healings helps administrations and varieties

of tongues are all apostles are all prophets are all teachers are all workers of miracles do all have gifts of healings do all speak in tongues do all interpret but earnestly desire the best gifts and yet i show you a more excellent way now you'll see that he is giving you a list of ministries apostles prophets and teachers now if you go to ephesians ephesians chapter 4 and verse 11 you remember there's a list of ministries five ministries apostles prophets evangelists pastors and teachers so three of that list of five is in here apostles prophets and teachers what is not mentioned here is pastors or elders and evangelists then he says after that miracles gifts of healings now what are these these are spiritual gifts from in fact this chapter nine spiritual gifts tongues interpretation

prophecy and so on and so he lists two of those gifts then he speaks about helps and administrations or helps and governments and then varieties of tongues what is varieties of tongues one of the nine in 1 corinthians chapter 12 so you can see that he is he is speaking about these prominent ministries now in between and gifts that they're operating in the church now in between are these two ministries that are not mentioned elsewhere helps and governments or administrations now you can see from the list that governments who who is the government and obviously we use that word carefully of the church the elders it's the elders so he's using this as another word for the elders the overseers and so by deduction and that is all it is because as i said it's not explicitly stated here they

helps refer to the deacons because that's what the deacons did in ephesians 6 they helped they helped the apostles to do the work in order that the apostles could get on with the work that god had called them to do now that is a very important and a little aspect or truth that helps us to understand this ministry it is helps it helps because people say but you know there is no list of ministries or help a list of things that deacons do in the new testament remember last week we looked at elders and we we have endless lists of jobs that the elders do from psalm chapter 2 from psalm 23 from isaiah from ezekiel chapter 34 the things that the elders didn't do from the new testament we have many many scriptures that tell us exactly what is required what elders are supposed to do their job

description but we do not have the same job description for deacons and i think there's a reason for that because the responsibility of elders never changes the responsibility for elders in the first church is still the

same today to care to shepherd to protect all of those things are still the same today but what deacons did in the first century and what deacons do today is very different in terms of the actual jobs that they do here they ran a feeding scheme we don't know that they ran a similar scheme in any of the other churches today deacons would do other things like bookkeeping or high-tech work like um like run the sound system run the web sites uh some churches have very big and complex websites uh the technological side um of the church um the the care of the building they

didn't have buildings in in those days so the the details that you do today is different to the details that they did then the details we would do in this church that deacons would do in this church is very different to the details that the deacons in a church in central africa would do because there they would not have technology they would not have bookkeeping they would not have telephones they would not have a sound system in a building but they would have other needs and that's why the scripture doesn't give us the details but it gives us this word helps and anything that helps the church falls under the responsibility in the category of deacons now let me make this clear again that all of us help some count the money some run the sound system some do this some do that it doesn't

mean that everybody that helps is a deacon automatically the same way as we all preach the gospel we should all be preaching the gospel but we are not all evangelists some are specifically called to the function of evangelists we should all be able to teach whether we're teaching our children or whether we we're teaching publicly but we're not all teachers we should all be shepherds we should be shepherding our families we should be shepherding the people around us and pastoring those people around us all of us should be pastoring but not all of us are elders in the official sense of the word and so we should all be helping but some people have a specific ministry that is what they do that is their life their calling is to be a deacon to serve the church and that is a very very

important function because if we go back to acts if the apostles were bogged down with the administration who knows what would have happened to the word maybe the message would never have got out if they had to end up running that local church and doing all the stuff that's involved in running the local church and so god gives them helps to help them deal with that now does every church have deacons remember we saw very clearly that every church has elders there are a number of scriptures that teach us that every church has elders must have elders but we don't have the same instruction concerning deacons not every church has deacons the church in the beginning this church of the church in acts did not have deacons but let's go back to acts chapter six it tells us when they appointed these

men verse one now in those days when the number of the multiply there arose this problem when the church was small it didn't need deacons it needed elders and we know that the apostles in this case were functioning as elders but when the church began to grow the need for helps began to grow also so if you have a small church in in in a in a home that doesn't have a building um or in a hired hall like our church in south africa we we did not have deacons because we had no paperwork we had no technology to run we we ran tapes and and that was that was it we we had no need for that sort of that sort of ministry but if that church was to grow and now had greater responsibilities and a greater budget and a building and all sorts of other things the need and the requirement for deacons would

would come into play and obviously at that time god would then raise up the men that are necessary or the people that are necessary to do that particular work so not every church needs or does have deacons i think many times churches feel themselves under pressure and they say well you know we're not a biblical new testament church because we have elders and we don't have deacons no not not all churches

churches need to have deacons it was only when the numbers multiplied and when the need arose the numbers had been multiplying but there was no problem there was no issue but suddenly an issue came up a situation arose a need came that needed to be met and that was when they appointed the deacons so and you'll see that these deacons here these men here were appointed for this specific task

they didn't give the responsibility of running all the mundane affairs of the church it was for a specific function and so deacons from this we would conclude that deacons would have very specific functions very specific areas of responsibility within within the operation of the church all right now the qualifications we we need to go back to that list in one corinthians sorry in one timothy chapter three thanks one timothy chapter three and you'll see as we've said that the um that the requirements here are as as stringent as for as for elders verse eight likewise deacons the word likewise in the same way as elders have this high standard in the same way deacons must be reverent not double-tongued not given too much wine not greedy for money holding the mystery of the faith of the pure

conscience let them first be tested or proven the same issue that we had with elders don't they should we should not lay hands on anyone suddenly as far as elders were concerned they were not to be novices so they need to be tested first then let them serve as deacons being found blameless because they are operating as representatives of the church and they need to be found as blameless again that high standard um let deacons be the husbands of one wife sorry where are we verse 11 likewise their wives must be reverent not slanderous temperate faithful in all things i'm going to come back to verse 12 let deacons be the husbands of one wife drooling their children and their own houses well so they have leadership abilities and they know how to run their homes then he's verse 13 he says for

those who have served well as deacons obtained for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in christ jesus so he's saying that those who function as deacons well obtained for themselves a good standing now some people mean they interpret that you mean that they can be promoted to becoming elders i i don't believe that there is a natural progression necessarily from deacons to elders yes deacons can become elders deacons can become something else as they grow and develop in their ministries but this is not we don't we we don't the scripture doesn't promote this idea of you start off as a deacon and then you work your way to an elder and you work your way to uh to a to a teacher you know or and then to a to an apostle that's the world's way of doing things um

some may begin as deacons and they will die as deacons and they have been faithful in that and if they've been faithful he says they will have obtained for themselves a good standing in other words they are worthy of respect now we're going to go back to romans 16 in a minute but you'll see there a person who has such good standing so that paul says help this person with any business because they are of a good standing so it's an honorable job in some churches there is a stigma to the deacons it's the guys who do all the lousy jobs fix the toilets and that sort of stuff um there is no stigma to this ministry it is a important ministry and as we've said out of these first seven men came two of the most important figures of the new testament of the early new testament church the first

martyr and philip the evangelist who brought about a great revival was used by god in a mighty way in samaria and in other parts of the world so the qualifications are strict if we go back to ephesia to acts chapter six you'll find that the although the list is different the standard is still equally high verse three act six verse three therefore brethren seek out from among you seven men of good reputation full of the holy spirit and wisdom that we may appoint over this business these are not carnal guys who happen to have a skill at running the accounts these are men who are full of the holy spirit who have a good reputation and

have wisdom so this is not a this is not a cast-off job this is a serious job and it's a spiritual job we we we don't want to draw to the the the the line

between elders and deacons is a very difficult to understand whether one begins in the other ends clearly deacons do not just handle material things otherwise why do they need to be full of wisdom and well they probably need wisdom to deal with the money but it goes deeper than that why do they need to be full of the holy spirit to deal with the accounts or to run the website or whatever why you need to be of the holy spirit to do that now clearly these men had a spiritual dimension to their ministry also as we saw two of them were preachers i have no doubt that in their dealing with the hebrews and the or with the with the widows they were dealing with spiritual issues all the time because what what was the heart of the problem it wasn't that some were getting more than others the heart

of the problem was a spiritual problem oh because we're spanish you guys you know the english guys don't look after us or the other way around the heart of the problem was not a administrative problem it was a spiritual problem it had an administrative component but it was a spiritual problem and there was no doubt that they would go around and they would they would uh feed and serve at the tables and whatever and and sister maria would come up and say but you know you know i have this problem my little my boy is is rebellious and he doesn't want to listen to me and you know his his father is dead you know what do i do and they would they would help and they would take the burden remember the principle that god or jethro gave to moses don't you decide on every matter but let's put men

over hundreds and fifties and so on and if they can't sort it out then let them come to you and i'm reasonably sure although the scripture doesn't tell us expressly but i'm reasonably sure that that's the way it happened here in the situation they would deal with the situations as they fed the women as they gained handed out the food and the money and clothing whatever they did they would deal with the issues as best as they could when an issue came up that was really a problem they couldn't deal with they would refer it to the apostles that that's the way i understand it you remember that we have a church here of 8 000 8 000 people there was no ways those 12 apostles could have contact with everybody and so there is no doubt in my mind that there is a very important spiritual dimension

to the ministry of the of the deacon so there's an overlap there's an area where their ministry overlaps but on the one extreme of the elders ministry is the responsibility for oversight and for teaching and on the other extreme of the deacons ministry is responsibility for the administration and in the middle the two overlap in the area of the day-to-day visitation and care of spiritual care of the of the of the folk in the in the church and so the that's why there is a very high standard required of these of these people it it gives again no technical skills it doesn't say that he must have a degree in accounting but in fact his qualifications are spiritual those are more important than his his material or his technical qualifications again these men hands were laid on them we assume

that that would be the pattern that hands would be laid on them um in the other cases also but there is a difference and we've highlighted this difference as to how these men are selected and you remember that elders are appointed by the apostles they are not elected but they are appointed because they represent god in the local in the local church so god appoints them through the apostolic ministry here these seven are elected by the people because remember that their responsibility is to represent the people they are dealing with the people's issues not so much god's issues again there's an overlap between both of those ministries and so the the principle that is established here is they um it says in verse three therefore brethren seek out from among you seven men and they give the

qualifications then verse five the saying please the whole multitude and they chose the multitude chose these men and then verse six whom they said before the apostles and when they had prayed they laid hands on them so the appointment comes by the hands of the apostles the selection comes by the people and and i believe that that is the way that is that this is the first time these men are appointed and i believe that that is a pattern that is now established and that it doesn't tell us any further about that because i believe that that the principle had been established and so there's a big difference between those two now let me just touch on this issue this does not allow for electioneering and politicking and if we ever came to a place or a time that we would need to appoint deacons

and i'm not sure how we develop as far as this is concerned right now but if we ever came to that place if anybody if i found if i was in a church and anyone was found to be electioneering he would be disqualified immediately because this is not a political seeking for favors to get into some kind of political office the fact that a man displays that kind of thing disqualifies him the appointment is not a year-to-year thing some churches elders are deacons are re-elected every year every three years every five years or whatever it is the scripture gives us no any both all of these ministries are for life an elder is for life deacon is for life until god moves him on to some other ministry or to heaven but it's not a kind of thing that is that changes every every now and then all right

let's go to romans chapter 16 i see i only have nine minutes left and i need to give some time to these two and we're going to get a little bit technical here and i'm not going to get too technical you can get the details from the paper but um i do need to get a little bit technical because it's important to establish this point romans chapter 16 verse 1 i commend to you phoebe our sister who is a servant of the church in saint crea that you may receive her in the lord in a manner worthy of the saints and assist her in whatever business she has need of for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also now this woman is listed as a servant of the church in saint crea and you remember that i said that there was this problem because we have one greek word describing two different

things the greek word diakonos servant which sometimes refers to those who are servants the way it is translated here and sometimes translated as those who hold the office of a deacon now was this woman and i know that there are some translations that actually translate this verse i commend to you phoebe our sister who is a deacon of the church in saint crea i believe that that is the way it should have been translated the reasons why i believe that is because first of all he says i commend you phoebe our sister who is a servant of the church not a servant in the church we're all servants in the church but there are only some who who are deacons of the church you see the difference so the fact that he says we that that she is a servant not in but off she's a deacon of the church to me and

to many other commentators it defines that as meaning that she held this office of a deaconess or a deacon in the church verse two that you may receive her in the lord in a manner worthy of the saints remember we spoke about they receive or they those who serve faithfully receive for themselves a good report and here you'll see somebody with a good report receive her in a manner worthy of the saints in other words treat her with respect and assist her in whatever business she has need of what is she doing here she's acting in an official capacity she has she has come to rome to deal with church business that's very clear from that passage from those those words and he says you guys help her in her business i i don't believe that if she would had come to sell jewelry that paul would have

said help her in her business she was on official church business which seems to indicate to me that she had a official capacity or role in the church assist her in whatever business she has need of for indeed she

has been a helper see the word of me and of many so this woman was officially recognized as a helper as a deacon in the church go with me to and as i said we i deal with this in much more detail in the paper so if you're you're welcome to ask for a copy of that ephesians chapter sorry one timothy chapter three one timothy three and this one gets a little bit more difficult in one timothy three was verses one to seven stay with me now we only have five minutes left and i'm going to get a little bit more complex verses one to seven he deals with the office of a bishop verse eight

he says likewise deacons must be reverent and he deals with that ministry then verse 11 you have the next word place where you find that word likewise he's here is a list of ministries that he is dealing with the problem here is in the translation if you if you look at if you look at your english version you'll see or even in the spanish probably you'll see likewise there is in italics you see that it's slanted there is i in other words it's not in the original the original reads like this likewise wives reverent those are the only words that are there in the greek likewise wives must be reverent he's not speaking about their wives the translator inserted the word their wives now we have the next problem that word wives in the greek the word guinea is normally can be translated as a wife

or as a woman all right now the bottom line let me just cut to the chase because i'm gonna lose you on this the bottom line is that the way i understand this verse and many many other commentators and translators the verse should read the woman deacons the women who serve as deacons let me read for you from um and he is a very well respected teacher he says the word used in reference to the marriage relation means a wife here it should be translated woman so in this verse should be translated woman it does not necessarily refer to the wives of the deacons and for the following reasons first the words even so or likewise likewise are the translation of hosotos which is used in in introducing a second or third in a series so he's saying bishops number one deacons number two women deacons

number three that's the the that's the way that word is being used the series here is of a church official second there is no possessive pronoun in the greek which would be needed if the women were the wives of the deacons so it's not saying the wives of the deacons it's saying woman clearly he's not referring to women in general because he's dealing here with church officials third the four qualifications which follow correspond with appropriate variations to the first four required for deacons as regards demeanor government of the tongue use of wine trustworthiness so it's the same requirements for deacons and for elders and for women deacons and fourth this is a section dealing wholly with church officials deacons wives have got nothing to do with this the only place where deacon's

wives come into the issue is whether he is running his home well that's the only issue if a deacon's wife is a and the brother has applied himself well he is not disqualified from deacons from deaconship this is not the intent of this passage so clearly what he is saying here is he is speaking about women as deacons and so forth the section is dealing wholly with church officials the reference here is to a woman or is to women who hold the office of deaconess as phoebe and that's um that's so after all of that bottom line is and i know that there are some people who see this differently but i've looked at this very very carefully and i'm convinced that there are male deacons and female deacons and it is not a problem because remember the things that a woman is barred from according to

paul to timothy is teaching and usurping authority over men now a deacon does not have to teach particularly not has to teach men and a deacon does not have to wield authority over men because they are helping what what does a wife do in the home how was eve made to be a helpmate a helper now i want to get in the whole marriage thing again but you you see the point there's there is there is nothing

there is no problem scripturally as i understand it for a sister to be a deacon in the local church amen um

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