

Those Who Serve

by William MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the importance of serving others, particularly in the context of the church, and provides guidance on the qualifications and rewards of deacons and the principles of Christian giving.

Scripture: 1 Timothy 5:22, Matthew 6:1-4, Mark 12:44, Romans 13:4, Romans 16:1, 1 Corinthians 9:14, Galatians 6:6, Philippians 4:18, 1 Timothy 3:8-13, 2 Timothy 2:17

Topics: "Church Leadership", "Servanthood"

Description

William MacDonald emphasizes the role of deacons in the church as servants who fulfill various ministries, highlighting their qualifications and the importance of integrity and faithfulness in their service. He explains that deacons must be grave, honest, and not greedy, and that their wives or deaconesses should also embody these qualities. MacDonald also discusses the rewards for deacons, which include a good standing among believers and boldness in faith, while stressing the need for proper financial stewardship within the church. He concludes by noting that the New Testament outlines only two roles in church leadership: bishops and deacons, rejecting the notion of a clergy class. The sermon underscores the simplicity and integrity required in church finances, advocating for self-supporting local congregations.

Transcript

THE DEACONS

In our study of bishops, we learned that their function is the spiritual care and oversight of the house of God. We noted that bishops are also called elders, and that there are several bishops in one church, rather than one bishop over several churches.

We come next to the study of deacons, who they are and what their functions are.

1. What Are Deacons?

The word "deacon" simply means a servant—a man who pursues some ministry or service. Frequently in the New Testament it is used in this very general sense. For instance, a duly appointed civil official who rules in public affairs is called a deacon of God (Romans 13:4). Phebe is spoken of as a deaconess of the church of Cenchrea (Romans 16:1). Christ Himself is described as a deacon of the circumcision for the truth of God (Romans 15:8). The name has come to be applied to the seven men who were chosen in Acts 6:1-7, to take care of the disbursing of funds. The English word "deacon" is not found in that passage, and

the word cannot be restricted to duties attending the administration of funds. It applies to any form of service, as is implied in the word "serve" (diakonein) in verse 2.

2. Their Qualifications

Although the exact duties of deacons are nowhere specified, yet their qualifications are given with great explicitness in 1 Timothy 3. Beginning with verse 8, we read: "Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well, purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."

The first requirement is gravity. A man who is lightheaded and frivolous will not be likely to gain the confidence of those whom he serves. Then the deacon must not be double-tongued. That is, he must be consistent. He must not give one account to certain individuals and a different version to others. Honesty and straightforwardness are mandatory. Especially if his service involves handling funds, he should use such methods as will avoid the slightest possibility of suspicion or distrust.

He must not be given to much wine. No one can place confidence in an intemperate person. Experience teaches that intemperance and excess are the enemies of accuracy and dependability. They ruin a man's testimony for God and unfit him for divine service. Also, he must not be greedy of filthy lucre. (Many of these requirements are identical with those of a bishop.) An avaricious spirit is a snare. If a man's heart is set on accumulating wealth, he can become so obsessed with this passion that every other activity in his life is made subservient to it.

The Kingdom of God and His righteousness no longer hold first place in his life, and work for God is shoddy and unacceptable. The deacon must hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. This is important. It is not enough for him to know the truth. He must practice the truth with a conscience void of offense toward God. Hymenaeus and Alexander both knew the Word of God, but they trifled with sin—that is, with evil doctrine (2 Timothy 2:17). They drowned out the voice of conscience and made shipwreck of the faith (1 Timothy 1:19, 20).

There is no substitute for a tender conscience, one which is prompt to discern that which is displeasing to God, and to take sides with the Lord against it. Next we read, "Let these also first be proved, then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless." This is a divine principle of considerable importance. "Let these also first be proved." In another passage, we read, "Lay hands suddenly on no man" (1 Timothy 5:22). It is a needed admonition for all of us. We are all prone to be impressed with a person the first time we meet him.

We immediately want to advance him to a position of responsibility. Then after a time, we realize that it was a rash act. "All that glitters is not gold." We judged him on too short a notice. The next qualification of deacons seems rather to deal with their wives. It reads, in the King James Version, "Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things." However, we feel that J. N. Darby's translation is more to the point. It reads, "The women in like manner grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things."

The point is that the women referred to are not the wives of deacons, but rather those who are themselves deaconesses. Phebe was a deaconess (servant) (Romans 16: 1). It would be difficult to understand why there should be special requirements for wives of deacons, when no such requirements are found for wives of bishops. However, there is no difficulty if it be understood that the verse applies to women who are serving the local church. As in the case of elders, we learn that a deacon must be the husband of one wife, ruling his own children and his own house well. We have already been reminded that if a man does not command respect and authority in his own home, it is hardly possible that he can do so in the church.

3. Their Rewards

Now the reward of the deacon is twofold. If a man serves well as a deacon, he purchases to himself a good degree. He gains for himself a good standing among his fellow saints and a good prospect of reward at the judgment seat of Christ. Secondly, he purchases to himself great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. True, the world looks upon such a goal as of little value. It is too mystical, intangible, vague. But to the child of God, it is more valuable than gold or precious stones.

With regard to the support of deacons, the same thing applies as in the case of bishops. There are some who engage in secular work, and who, therefore, provide for their own needs. Others devote themselves wholly to the work of the Lord and for all such the principle is: "They which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:14), "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things" (Galatians 6:6).

4. Conclusion

Now in closing our study on deacons, we should like to refer once again to Philippians 1:1. There we find three types of people mentioned as being in the church of God—saints, bishops and deacons. It is noteworthy that those are the only classes named. Saints first, then bishops, then deacons. The absence of another class known as the clergy is noteworthy, as has been pointed out by Barnes in his Commentary on the New Testament: "There are not 'three orders' of clergy in the New Testament. The apostle Paul in this chapter (1 Timothy 3) expressly designates the characteristics of those who should have charge of the church, but mentions only two, 'bishops, and 'deacons'-there is no 'third' order. There is no allusion to anyone who was to be 'superior' to the 'bishops' and 'deacons.' As the apostle Paul was expressly given instructions in regard to the organization of the church, such an omission is unaccountable if he supposed there was to be an order of 'prelates' in the church. Why is there no allusion to them? Why is there no mention of their qualifications? If Timothy was himself a prelate, was he to have nothing to do in transmitting the office to others? Were there no peculiar qualifications required in such an order of men which it would be proper to mention? Would it not be respectful, at least, in Paul to have made some allusion to such an office, if Timothy himself held it?"

The answer is, of course, that if the organization of the New Testament church contained any other order than bishops and deacons, then Paul would have mentioned it. The vast ecclesiastical systems of our day have been added by men, with no warrant whatever from the Word of God.

THE CHURCH'S FINANCES

Throughout the New Testament, it is both stated and implied that the church receives its finances from those who are within. There is no hint of any unsaved persons outside the church contributing to its support. Christian giving is an act of worship and is thus limited to those who have been redeemed by the

precious blood of Christ. Neither is there any hint of a local church being regularly financed, subsidized, or supported by any other church, group of churches, or council. There were special adverse circumstances, such as the Judean famine (AGts 11:29) occasioning practical financial fellowship being shown by some churches to fellow-believers. Every local church should be self supporting. The major teachings of the New Testament with regard to this important subject of the church's finances may readily be outlined.

1. Who Owns What?

All that a Christian has belongs to God. The believer is to act as a steward, using all he has in the best possible way for his Master's glory. (See Luke 16:1-12.) F. B. Meyer stated the truth as follows: "We are meant to be stewards; not storing up our Lord's money for ourselves, but administering for Him all that we do not need for the maintenance of ourselves and our dear ones, in the position of life in which God has placed us. And our only worldly aim should be to lay out our Lord's money to the very best advantage; so that we may render Him an account with joy, when He comes to reckon with us."

2. When and Where to Give

The Christian is instructed to give to the work of the Lord. When is he to give? "Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store" (1 Corinthians 16:2). How much is he to give? He is to give "as God has prospered him" (1 Corinthians 16: 2) and as Christ gave. He was rich, but became poor that we might be rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). He is our example. We should give out of our want, not out of our abundance (Mark 12:44). In short, the Christian should give liberally. The tithe (one tenth) was the minimum given by an Israelite. He brought tithes and offerings. No Christian should be content to give, under grace, what was the minimum requirement under law.

3. How to Give

In what spirit is he to give? He should first give himself to the Lord (2 Corinthians 8:5), thus acknowledging that all belongs to Him. Giving must be done in love (1 Corinthians 13:3), else it is valueless. It should be done in secret (Matthew 6:1-4)-so secret that the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing, to use a figure of speech. It should be done cheerfully, not grudgingly (2 Corinthians 9:7). We find that the early Christians sold their possessions and shared their wealth with one another (Acts 2:44, 45; 4:31-37). This was an outward expression of their true spiritual fellowship. Such action is nowhere commanded in the New Testament. In fact, the instructions of Scripture concerning Christian giving presuppose private ownership of property. The action by the early church was purely voluntary. While it is not to be confused with monasticism or with the "communism" of today, the implication is clear. When believers are controlled by the Holy Spirit, they will be generous in giving to every genuine case of need as He may direct.

4. The Reward

What are the rewards for giving? When we are faithful in the unrighteous mammon (in the use of our money), God will commit true riches (spiritual treasures) to our trust (Luke 16:11). Fruit abounds to the account of the giver (Philippians 4:17). He will have treasures in Heaven (Matthew 6:19-21), because his gifts are "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God" (Philippians 4:18).

5. The Assembly Treasurer

Those who handle the funds of the church should use business methods that are above reproach. "Provide for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men" (2 Corinthians

8:21). At least two men should be appointed to take charge of the offering. In Acts 6:1-6 we read that seven men were appointed to handle the distribution of funds to widows in the assembly. The Epistles contain no definite instructions as to exactly how many men should handle the money, but it is clear from 1 Corinthians 16:3, 4 and 2 Corinthians 8:18, 19 that it was customary to entrust this responsibility to more than one. In the former passage, Paul states that he would send those whom the Corinthians approved with the offering to Jerusalem, and, if necessary, he would go, too. Note the plurals-"them" (verse 3); "they" (verse 4). In the latter reference, Paul explains that another brother was chosen to travel with him in distributing the gift from the church.

6. The Giving of the Local Church

The New Testament reveals three principal purposes for which the funds of the church are expended. These are for widows in the assembly, for poor saints and for those who devote their time to preaching and teaching the Word.

For widows in the assembly (Acts 6:1-6). In order to qualify as a "widow indeed" (1 Timothy 5:3-16), a woman had to meet the following requirements. (1) She had to be desolate; that is, without any relatives who could support her, and utterly cast upon the Lord for her needs (vv. 4,5,16). (2) She had to be at least sixty years old. (3) She had to be known for her good works, her noble motherhood, her hospitality, and her charity (see v. 10). For the poor saints. God has exhorted us many times in His Word to remember the poor (e.g., Galatians 2:10; Romans 12:13); and the prosperity of His people in the Old Testament is closely linked with their treatment of their needy brethren (Deuteronomy 14:29).

Around AD. 45, many of the Christians in Judea were stricken with poverty. This was probably due to severe persecution and widespread famine. The saints in Antioch sent relief to the Judean brethren by the hands of Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:27-30). The assembly at Corinth was urged to do the same thing (1 Corinthians 16:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8 and 9). We are likewise responsible to care for those in need. The Lord Jesus said, "Ye have the poor with you always," (Mark 14:7). It is good for an assembly to have poor members whom it can care for with a godly exercise.

Barnes points out that a great way to unite Christians and to prevent alienation and jealousy and strife is to have a common object of charity, in which all are interested and to which all may contribute. The assembly is not, however, responsible for those who are poor because they do not want to work. In such cases the divine decree is that, if any man will not work, neither shall he eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10). For those who devote their time to the work of the Lord. It is a divine principle that those who preach the Gospel or teach the Word are entitled to the support of the saints.

"Let him who is receiving instruction in the Word give ungrudgingly a share of his worldly goods to him who instructs him" (Galatians 6:6, Way's Translation). (See also 1 Corinthians 9:4-13; 1 Timothy 5:17,18.) Oftentimes, however, the Apostle Paul labored with his hands, rather than accept fellowship from assemblies (Acts 18:3). His reasons for this were simple. He wanted to serve as an example to the Ephesians, that they, too, might support the weak and know the blessedness of giving (Acts 20:33-35).

He also wished to prevent his critics in Corinth from charging him with mercenary motives (2 Corinthians 11:7-12). In addition he desired to prevent the Thessalonian believers from being burdened with his support (1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9). The saints there were poor and were being persecuted. The assembly at Philippi was commended for ministering to Paul (Philippians 4:10-19). Note that Paul did not desire the fellowship because of his need, but because he wanted fruit to abound to their

account.

Note, also, that although the Apostle never publicized his personal needs, he did not hesitate to make known the needs of other saints (2 Corinthians 8 and 9). There is, thus, a difference between information and solicitation. As Dr. Chafer has pointed out--"All will agree that information is required, else no intelligent giving is possible; but the real problem centers around the question of solicitation."

7. Conclusion

The reader of the New Testament will notice how delightfully simple is the financing of the Church. There are no burdensome, legalistic rules, neither is there an elaborate, complex financial organization. If the simple precepts of the Scripture were followed, two important results would ensue. The needs of the Church would be liberally supplied without solicitations. The Church would not have to be reproached by the world as a moneymaking institution.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/william-macdonald/those-who-serve/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net