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N. Bayliss

Deacon/Elder Lecture Outlines

Lecture 13

The Duties and Responsibilities of Deacons and Deaconesses

I. Introduction

- A. This is the age of dwindling natural resources. In fact, resources are at times in such short supply that a crisis occurs in commodities like paper, water or oil.
- B. But one resource that has always been in short supply is qualified manpower and woman-power to do the Work of God. That is why Christ commanded us to pray that He would send laborers into the harvest (Matthew 9:37-38).
- C. One of the rich resources of manpower and woman-power which God has supplied is that of deacons and deaconesses. Because this resource is so precious, it behooves the Church to ensure that this resource is being properly managed and encouraged.

II. SPS

This lecture will explain the duties and responsibilities of deacons and deaconesses.

III. Need

Deacons and deaconesses have been a part of the Church so long that sometimes we take them for granted and perhaps neglect to stop and ask ourselves why we need to rehearse such a subject as this.

Here are some of the reasons it is good to review the responsibilities of deacons and deaconesses:

- A. They greatly influence the stability and attitude of the local church.

Usually the deacons and deaconesses are spiritual pillars of the congregations and are looked up to by the members. It is therefore vital that we do not

neglect instructing this important group on their duties.

B. They need to know what is expected of them.

One great frustration of any employee or volunteer is when he doesn't know what his job is. We must not allow this state of affairs to exist among those whom God has chosen to serve His people in such a personal way.

C. They need to know how to do their jobs.

Knowing what is expected of you is not enough. A person must have instruction in how to do his job properly. This is only fair for we cannot require someone to fulfill his responsibilities if he does not know how to do the job.

D. Instruction such as this promotes uniformity and unity.

It is helpful to have guidelines from headquarters defining how things should be done. We are to do the same things and have unity in God's Church. Read I Corinthians 1:10.

IV. Definition and Description of the Office

The place to start is with a job description. How many of our deacons have ever been given a job description? It can be easily done.

A. First read Acts 6:1-8. These verses give the historical basis for the office of deacon. From these, we are also able to construct a definition of the role.

B. From the biblical instruction we can discern the following points about the roles of deacons and deaconesses:

1. Deacons are charged with mostly duties of a temporal (physical) nature. For example, service to widows.
2. It is a position to which one is ordained through the laying on of hands rather than merely appointed verbally.

3. The office requires one to meet certain spiritual standards or criteria. We see these further delineated in I Timothy 3:8-13.
 4. Deacons sometimes do have some spiritual duties as assigned by the ministry. Some of our deacons may give sermonettes, for example.
- C. Putting these points together, we can compose a biblical definition: A deacon or deaconess is a person of spiritual maturity ordained from the congregation to serve the physical needs of the local church as directed by the ministry. It is not an office of the clergy, but is a dignified and important position.

V. Qualifications -- The Duty to Set a Good Example

- A. Everyone hearing this lecture is probably familiar with the qualifications of a deacon and deaconess given in I Timothy 3. But these qualifications are not merely for the minister to read and ponder prior to ordaining a deacon. They are also for the deacon to refer to and meditate upon so he may compare himself to see if he meets the standard God sets.
- B. Indeed, the first duty of a deacon is to ensure that he meets the standards or qualifications. One of the best ways to promote such self-evaluation is to read these verses and emphasize the qualifications, and understand what the various words, such as "blameless," mean today.

VI. God's Government

A deacon or deaconess is ordained into an official position within the framework of God's governmental structure. In the past, misunderstandings about how God's government in the Church should work, and a lack of understanding of where and how the deacon fits into that government, has been the cause of some problems within local congregations.

Therefore, it is vital that we reaffirm and explain some of the principles of the operation of God's government as they relate to deacons and deaconesses.

A. Structure

God's government is a pyramidal hierarchy with Jesus Christ as head of the Church under the overall direction of God the Father (Colossians 1:18). Under

Christ is the ministry, but still part of the governmental structure, are the deacons, deaconesses and other "helps." Read I Corinthians 12:28.

B. Relationship With Headquarters

Deacons, like all members, are taught doctrine directly from headquarters via Church literature, tapes, etc. However, administratively, deacons are linked to headquarters through their local pastors. Thus they must be sure to be responsive to the leadership of the local ministry, for it is to the local ministry that the deacons primarily answer.

C. Relationship to Members

Although all members receive instruction directly from headquarters, most matters of administration are handled through the local pastors. Often, but not always, the deacons are vital links to the people from the local ministry. It is therefore crucial that the deacons and deaconesses accurately reflect the will of the local ministry to the members in how they act, talk and direct activities.

It's often true that a pastor will appoint a deacon to be over a temporary or permanent crew assigned to a certain job or responsibility. In all routine matters relating to the chore at hand, the members should, of course, look to the deacon for direction. However, the serving member should never be or feel dissuaded from approaching the pastor directly with a problem concerning the job that he feels he cannot resolve with the deacon.

What has been said above refers to physical matters related to a job at hand. It goes without saying that all members "report" spiritually to the ministry directly without having to go through a sub-organization of deacons or others.

D. Relationship to Local Church Elder

What has just been said to be true of members in regard to deacons is also true of deacons in regard to local church elders. That is, a deacon may be assigned certain duties under the direction of a local church elder, but he always has the right to approach the pastor in case of conflict. Furthermore, in personal, spiritual matters, a deacon has no need to approach the pastor through the local church elder.

All local church elders are not "over" all deacons in a line authority sense.

E. Summary

The point of these comments about government is to show that no deacon or deaconess can allow himself or herself to act independently of the local ministry.

God's ministers are required by God to be faithful conduits of truth through which God's way of doing things is transmitted to the people from God's leadership at headquarters. Read II Timothy 2:1-2.

In like manner, deacons are themselves a link in the chain of authority with connections up and down the chain. Like the ministry, they must be accurate reflections of the will of their superiors so that the truth which is flowing to the people through the local ministry will not be stifled, changed or distorted -- even unintentionally -- by them.

As can be seen, one important test of a deacon or deaconess is how well he or she serves the local pastor in the temporal duties he assigns. The test is not how creative or capable they are, per se, but how they apply themselves to fruitful and selfless, balanced service. Misunderstanding about this point has caused much disruption in the past and must be avoided.

F. Exceptions

Although deacons are to follow the local ministry, there are times when they should not do so. They should not follow the local minister if he, for example, is departing from the way the Church is directing him.

Here are some guidelines showing when it may be necessary to go around the authority of the ministry.

1. A deacon or deaconess should not go over the head of the minister:
 - a. In matter merely involving personality differences. The deacon should overlook such differences and strive to cooperate with the pastor. Read Hebrews 13:17.
 - b. In matters of administrative style within the broad guidelines headquarters allows.

- c. When the minister has made an innocent mistake or slip of the tongue. The deacon should discuss the matter with the pastor and resolve it. Read Matthew 18:15-20.
2. The deacon or deaconess may go over the minister's head when:
 - a. The pastor teaches intentional doctrinal error or heresy.
 - b. The pastor clearly and markedly departs from the administrative policies instituted from headquarters.
 - c. The pastor (or elder) commits a serious sin that threatens his own spiritual life or the well-being of the congregation.

Note: Caution is in order here. Remember that when one goes over his superior's head, he should be in a good attitude and correct in his facts. No matter what the outcome of such a move, the move has serious implications for those involved. Such action should never be taken lightly, therefore.

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God's government allows such actions, for it is through this means that we can be sure we are never cut off from God by an intermediate weak link in the chain. Still, it is a serious move and should not be done capriciously or taken lightly.

VII. Methods of Doing Duties

When we stop and analyze it, the duties a deacon performs must be performed differently -- very differently -- from how deacons or similar offices of the world's churches go about doing their duties. That is, the deacons must not fall into the trap of doing God's service man's way.

Here are the important ways in which a deacon should fulfill his responsibilities:

A. Service

As Christ pointed out, it is common for people in authority to fall into an attitude of lordship rather than of service. Read Matthew 20:25-28. This must not be the case of our deacons and deaconesses who are to serve.

B. Humility

Not only must a deacon do the job of a servant (that is, serve and not be served), but his attitude should also reflect humility of mind. Read Isaiah 66:2, I Peter 5:5-6.

C. Responsiveness

A deacon in God's Church must be quick to implement the needs of the ministry in serving the people.

D. Teachability

The purpose of God's government is not just to direct, but to teach. Therefore, the local pastor hopes that the deacons and leaders under him will not only obey his directives, but that they will be good students and learn the principles which God is trying to teach His Church through the local ministers.

E. Example

The principles and objectives taught to the deacons should filter down through them to the people they serve. Their example is a strong teacher.

F. Diligence

Proverbs 12:24 says, "The hand of the diligent will rule." Those who are in authority, such as the deacons and deaconesses, must always be diligent in their duties.

G. Dependability

A person who is reliable is always a good servant. One who is unreliable can never be fully counted on.

VIII. Specific Duties

The specific duties of deacons may be subdivided into certain categories. Some of these categories are listed here to help our leaders understand the nature of each type of duty.

A. Implied in the Bible

The Bible itself states that the purpose of deacons is to serve the needs of the widows (Acts 6:1-2). We may also add to that group the fatherless and other needy people (James 1:27).

Therefore, each deacon or deaconess should consider himself or herself a committee of one to notice problems among such groups and help without being told. He or she should notice things and act on his or her own initiative.

Of course, such help should be done in a manner which does not conflict with the specifically assigned responsibilities of other deacons. Nor should these things be done without the pastor's knowledge or consent.

B. Assigned Duties

Most of a deacon's duties are specifically assigned by the pastor. It goes without saying that the whole intention of this lecture is to help deacons fulfill these responsibilities in the spirit and manner described in this lecture. Here are some examples of typical duties:

1. Setting up/taking down chairs
2. Assisting/organizing YOUTH groups and activities
3. Assisting/organizing senior citizen groups and activities
4. Organizing church potlucks (set-up, food service, clean-up)
5. Driving widows to and from services
6. Caring for widows throughout the week (lawn work, housework, etc.)
7. Contacting brethren to pass on urgent messages from minister (e.g., change in location of services)
8. Cleaning church hall before/after use on Sabbath
9. Cassette-taping Sabbath services
10. Distributing sermon tapes to "shut-ins" *housebound*
11. Organizing sending meals to disabled members
12. Visiting hospitalized members
13. Providing flower arrangements for the stage on Sabbaths

14. Handing out songbooks on the Sabbath
15. Taking attendance
16. Taking up offerings on Holy Days and assisting in counting
17. Giving opening/closing prayers
18. Organizing church book library and tape library
19. Setting up mother's room on the Sabbath
20. Receiving extra responsibilities in Spokesman Club

Special Note: When listed in one place like this, it is obvious that the responsibilities deacons handle are many and varied. It is also obvious that these duties are critical to the successful running of the local church. The importance of these duties -- and hence of the deacons and deaconesses -- can simply not be overstated.

Sometimes the so-called "spiritual" duties like sermonettes are esteemed highly, but these physical duties are not considered important. Such thinking is shortsighted. The physical duties of the deacon have tremendous spiritual impact. The role of a deacon is extremely important, and his/her duties are as well.

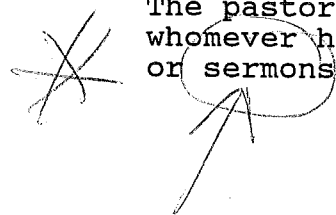
C. Speaking

The duty of giving sermonettes is in many ways a separate category. Pastors from time to time hold meetings to instruct the speakers how to better do their job.

What should be said here is that while deacons are often given the opportunity to speak, this is not always the case. No one should feel hurt or left out if he is a deacon and is not asked to speak.

Speaking assignments such as sermonettes are not a standard part of the job description of a deacon. In the past, some few deacons have felt unfairly treated if one or more of the other deacons in a church area were on the speaking list but they were not.

The pastor has been given the discretion to assign whomever he chooses as qualified to give sermonettes or sermons. No deacon should feel slighted if he is



not asked to speak. Those who are extended the opportunity to serve in this way should be grateful for the opportunity for extra training. Those not invited to speak will be serving in many other, and sometimes in even more valuable, ways.

IX. Problem Areas and Pitfalls

The opportunities a deacon or deaconess has in God's Church are many and varied. Yet these special opportunities afford certain potential problems and pitfalls, both physical and spiritual.

Here are some of the more common ones:

A. Vanity or Self-righteousness

A leader in God's Church must never fall into the trap of becoming vain or lifted up in pride. Read I Timothy 3:6. Likewise, he must never become critical of the people he serves or views them as inferior. Remember Christ's love for all (John 3:16).

B. Competition

Competition between yourselves or striving for advancement should be repented of (Philippians 2:3). You should humble yourself in God's sight so He may lift you up if He so desires (I Peter 5:6).

C. Disloyalty

The point above regarding Church government may be reiterated here.

D. Jealous of Responsibilities

Don't allow yourself to feel resentment if you are moved to another responsibility, or if someone tries to help you in your present one.

E. Spiritual Lethargy

Even though leaders in God's Church, we must not allow ourselves to lose out on salvation through neglect (I Corinthians 9:24-27).

Spiritual lethargy often takes the form of neglecting prayer, Bible study or meditation. Sometimes this occurs because the deacon's physical service crowds out his spiritual time for God. Be vigilant and never let this happen to you.

F. Being Served Instead of Serving

Matthew 20:25-28 shows the greatest are those who serve.

G. Serving Too Much

No one should serve so much that he harms his family, or his physical or spiritual health. Communicate with your pastor if you find this to be a problem. Remember the necessity to set a good example in all areas of your Christian life. Read I Timothy 3:12.

H. Using Man's Methods

God does things in His Work differently from the way man does things. We must use God's way and wisdom and not man's (James 3:13-18 and I Corinthians 2:1-8).

I. Succumbing to Lusts of the Flesh

All of us are susceptible to the weaknesses of human nature like sexual sins and must be always on guard against these things. Read Ephesians 4:22 and I John 2:16.

J. Becoming Weary of Well Doing

It is a tendency in all of us to tire with service. We must not allow this common foible of human nature to ensnare us. Read Galatians 6:9-10.

X. Rewards of Service

The service a deacon or deaconess renders affords the server many rewards. Of course, our main goal should be the Kingdom of God and we should not look to full reward now in this age. But it can be good to focus briefly upon some of the rewards as an incentive to further service.

We can know for sure that our efforts are not being overlooked by God, but will afford us thanks from Him. Remember the words of Paul: "For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (I Timothy 3:13).

A. Satisfaction

In all labor there is profit, and much of this profit comes from the satisfaction of doing a job which needs to be done.

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B. Feelings of Thankfulness

Only a few in this age will ever know the joy of working for God directly in His Work. Even though not on salary, our deacons and deaconesses should from time to time focus on the joy they get from doing a job that has eternal implications.

It may at first seem strange that we would be thankful for work. But work can be a great blessing. Jesus Christ said that His will was to do the will of the Father and finish His work (John 4:34). If the same attitude is found in Christ's deacons, the Church of God will be well on the way to accomplishing the Father's will on earth.

C. Seeing People Change

Much of the duties we do, and in which the deacons share, results directly or indirectly in change in people. Certainly seeing such change is a reward of great magnitude and one which should not be overlooked.

XI. Conclusion

As stated at the outset, our deacons and deaconesses are one of the greatest resources we have at our disposal in serving the local church. God, the ministry and the leaders at headquarters are grateful to you for your service.

Thank you!