

Deacons in Jerusalem

By Paul R. Blake

I recently received this question from a brother in Ohio: *"In our Wednesday Bible study there was a question asked... 'if the seven men of good reputation in Acts 6 were appointed as deacons?' And, can you prove it?"*

Answer: It must be understood that when Acts 6 was written, New Testament doctrine regarding the church was in process of being revealed. It was not an instantaneous process, but rather revelation took place on some occasions as problems arose that necessitated it. For example, in Acts 15 when trouble arose over the matter of circumcision, the brethren came together in Jerusalem and the Holy Spirit guided them into an authorized solution to the matter (15:28). So it is with Acts 6, when the problem arose over caring for the Grecian widows, the apostles in their capacity as spokesmen for the Lord provided an authorized solution (Acts 6:6). The apostles appeared to be doing the kind of work that was later done by elders, even though they were not called by that name. Acts 6:4 - "but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

Elders were not called by that name until Acts 11:30. In addition, James, Peter, and John appear to be elders in the church at Jerusalem, even though they do not have that name in Acts 6 (See Acts 28:8; Gal. 2:9; 1Peter 5:1). Neither are the seven men called deacons in Acts 6, even though they are doing the work that was later assigned to deacons (1Tim. 3:13).

However, it must be clear that deacons cannot be appointed in the absence of elders. Phil. 1:1 makes it clear that the church is scripturally organized when it has elders, deacons, and members. Furthermore, the men appointed to care for the distribution in Acts 6, did so under the direction of the apostles who appear to be serving in the role of overseers in the church at Jerusalem at that time.

It is not possible to prove that the seven men of Acts 6 were deacons, any more than we can prove that the apostles were elders. What we can prove is that by Acts 14:23, all churches were to be organized with elders, and by Philippians 1:1 local churches were scripturally organized with elders, deacons and members. What took place before those texts in terms of the organization of local churches is between those autonomous churches and the Lord. But for our day, we must be organized as clearly specified in the New Testament revelation of God's will for local churches. We can no more return to the time of Acts chapters two through six organization for the church, than we can return to the time of direct apostolic teaching and miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit. We rejoice in the wisdom of God as manifested in the organization of the church with qualified elders and deacons.

No Vacancy

"And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ" (Col. 3:23-24).

When a slow-moving clerk in a small store was not around one morning, a customer asked the owner's young son, "Where's Eddie? Is he sick?" "Nope, he ain't workin' here no more," was the reply. "Do you have anyone in mind for the vacancy?" inquired the customer. "Nope! Eddie didn't leave no vacancy!"

We smile, but the statement which characterized Eddie, equally applies to many members of the church today. In serving the Lord, they are so weak and lukewarm that if they moved to another State their absence would scarcely be noticed. 1Corinthians 15:58 says, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

A Moments Wisdom on Punctuality

Some do not take it seriously:

- "The trouble with being punctual is that nobody's there to appreciate it." (Franklin Jones)
- "I am a believer in punctuality though it makes me very lonely." (E. V. Verrall)
- "Laugh and the world laughs with you; be prompt and you dine alone." (Gerald Barzan)

It should be valued highly

- "Promptitude is not only a duty, but is also a part of good manners; it is favorable to fortune, reputation, influence, and usefulness; a little attention and energy will form the habit, so as to make it easy and delightful." (Charles Simmons)
- "I give it as my deliberate and solemn conviction that the individual who is habitually tardy in meeting an appointment, will never be respected or successful in life." (W. Fisk)
- "I owe all my success in life to having been always a quarter of an hour before my time, and it has made a man of me." (Lord Nelson)
- "Punctuality is the politeness of kings." (Louis XVIII)
- "Unfaithfulness in the keeping of an appointment is an act of clear dishonesty. You may as well borrow a person's money as his time." (Horace Mann)
- "Better hours too soon than minutes too late. Better late than never, but best never late!" (William Shakespeare)

"When we are late for these meetings to worship God or to learn of God, it may be indicative God is not really as important as whatever causes us to be late, be it our bodily rest, our meals, our recreation, our chores, etc. We are, of course, not saying that all lateness for the appointed means would fall into this sin. But if we are habitually late for the means, we must really examine our attitude towards the Lord. One who is generally on time for other appointments but is usually late for worship or prayer is probably experiencing severe backsliding. One who is generally late for all appointments is probably also suffering some form of tardiness in the soul. No one who genuinely loves Christ can be late for an appointment with Him without feeling shame and embarrassment." (The Pilgrim Covenant)

"The best-laid plans, the most important affairs, the fortunes of individuals, the weal of nations, honor, life itself, are daily sacrificed because somebody is 'behind time.' There are men who always fail in whatever they undertake simply because they are 'behind time.' There are others who put off reformation year by year, till death seizes them; and they perish unrepentant, because forever 'behind time.' Five minutes in a crisis is worth years. It is but a little period, yet it has often saved a fortune or redeemed a people. If there is one virtue that should be cultivated more than another by him who would succeed in life, it is punctuality; if there is one error that should be avoided, it is being 'behind time.'" (Freeman Hunt)