

Acts 034  
The First Deacons  
Acts 6:1-7  
January 10, 2024  
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If we could take our Bibles and open them to Acts chapter 6. I want to welcome you all back from Christmas, New Year's and everything-in-between breaks. We're starting a new quarter and continuing through the book of Acts. Having completed chapter 5 before the break, we're now in chapter 6. So, I'd love to be able to cover verses 1 through 7 tonight. And this is where we learn about the beginning of the deacons. We have deacons in our church. Did you guys know that? Where do these people come from? Why do we need deacons? So here in Acts chapter 6, you can sort of take the chapter and divide it into two. You have the appointment of the first deacons, verses 1 through 7 in the church. And then those deacons are-- there's seven of them. They're mentioned by name. And the first one that's named is Stephen. And Stephen gets arrested at the end of the chapter, and then he gets martyred in chapter 7. So, I tell people, don't be too eager to become a deacon. You never know what's going to happen to you. But here we have Acts chapter 6:1-7. As Luke is documenting the birth and the growth of the church, an important event happens here in Acts chapter 6 with the Holy Spirit raising up a new office: the office of deacon.

- I. Appointment of the First Deacons (6:1-7)
  - A. Occasion (1)
  - B. Apostles' advice (2-4)
  - C. Appointment (5-6)
  - D. Results (7)
- II. Stephen's Arrest (6:8-15)

So, we have the occasion (verse 1), the apostle's advice (verses 2 – 4), the actual appointment of the deacons (verses 5 – 6) and then the results (verse 7). And the results are good. So notice, first of all, the occasion. We have the timing and then we have the circumstances. Notice verse 1 it says, *Now at this time*-- now what time would that be? It would be right after the persecution of the apostles by the Sanhedrin that we read about in chapter 5. And then you have the circumstances that gave rise to what we're

going to read about here, this office that's being raised up. It says: *Now at this time while the while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food.* So, notice, first, this word "disciples." ...*while the disciples were increasing...* What is a disciple? It's the Greek word *mephtis*. And basically, it means a learner, a pupil. In fact, the English word disciple comes from our word discipline. If a father puts their child under discipline, they're trying to teach that child something. And that's where the whole concept of disciple comes from. One who is disciplined. So, these are people in the early church that are growing into Christ's likeness. They're not just getting saved, you know, justified by faith alone, but they're actually becoming Christ-like in their daily life, and they're becoming disciples.

### **Purposes of the Local Church**

- Glorify God (Eph 3:21)
- Edify the saints (Eph 4:11-16)
- Fulfill the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20)

Which of course is one of the great purposes of the church. What are the purposes of the local church? In other words, why are we here? Well, we serve a good potluck meal, but that's not our main purpose, right? The potluck meal or any other activity our church does always has to be understood in light of our three major objectives. And you see the scriptures there in parenthesis. The purpose of the local church is to glorify God (Ephesians 3:21), to edify the saints (Ephesians 4:11-46), to bring those that are believers into full knowledge of Jesus so they can become Christ like. And then it's also to get us outside the four walls and get out there in the world where we live. And fulfill the Great Commission by being an evangelistic influence on those you come in contact with (Matthew 28:18-20). So, you have contact with people that I could never have contact with. Unsaved family members, unsaved friends, unsaved coworkers. And one of the jobs of the local church is to equip you so that you can reach out to them and be a bold witness to them wherever, whatever sphere of influence that you're in. So, concerning that third bullet point, this is what Jesus said in the Great Commission, Matthew 28:18-20. It says, *And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth--" speaking to the twelve-- "Go therefore and make disciples,"* you know not just believers, but disciples of all nations. So, this

call goes into the whole world. *"--baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,"* and then you sort of have the definition of a disciple: *"teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the end of the age."*

So that's what was happening here in the first Church in Jerusalem, as we've studied its birth, its growth, and you see a large number of people not just getting saved but growing in their faith. So, they're growing in the middle tense of their salvation; their progressive sanctification. Having already been justified, the first tense of salvation, they're now growing in the middle tense of their salvation, progressive sanctification. And then they're on their way, ultimately, to glorification which occurs either at Rapture or death. And I bring this up because a lot of people think if we just evangelize the world, we'll fulfill the Great Commission. And that really isn't true because the Great Commission isn't just evangelize, it's to grow people up. So, when you bring your newborn home from the hospital after a birth, you know, you don't say to the newborn, 'help yourself to a ham sandwich when you get hungry.' You have to nurture that child. And that's largely what the local church is here to do.

In the book of Acts 11:26, the church became so proficient at this that they developed a name for these disciples. And they started to call them Christians. That's the first time the word Christian is used in the whole Bible, in the whole book of Acts. It's not used until the church makes its way up north to Antioch in Acts 11:26. It says, *when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.* Why are these disciples called Christians? Because that's really the only name that would fit. These people were so Christ-like in terms of their moral character and in terms of their daily life, that the only name that would really fit them is Christians. Which basically means little Christs. We're not saying they became deity, of course, but when you looked at how they were behaving, when you looked at how they were acting, it reminded everybody of Jesus. And so that's what was happening here in this early church. The disciples were, verse 1, increasing in number. Why are they increasing in number? Because Jesus said, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. So, since Christ made that statement concerning the church which was born in Acts 2, it shouldn't be surprising to see the growth of the church, and particularly the growth of people into Christians, into Christ's likeness.

And this becomes one of the progress reports that Doctor Luke is using to convince Theophilus. The recipient of the letter that Christianity is for him too, as a Gentile. And because Christianity is authentic. And Luke, as a careful historian, as a doctor, as a physician who by definition has to be careful, he's documenting the growth of the church so that by the time the church hits Rome and Theophilus gets saved, Theophilus will read this and understand that this whole Christian movement is authentic and legitimate. And therefore, Theophilus was contemplated in the plan of God. But the purpose of the book is to present Theophilus with an orderly account of the birth and the growth of the church, so as to affirm him in what he has believed.

And Luke documents the birth and the growth of the church numerically, geographically and ethnically. Geographically-- how it made its way all the way to Rome. Ethnically-- how it started off sort of as an offshoot of Judaism, but eventually became a predominantly Gentile institution, not exclusively, but predominantly. And then he's showing the birth of the church numerically. And he does that through different progress reports. In Acts 2, three thousand are saved. In Acts 4, you've got five thousand. And why does Luke keep doing this? Because he's trying to document how this move of God, the church age, is really authentic. To show Theophilus that he's believed the real thing because Theophilus believed in Christ through the message of the church. So that's why Luke includes these little statements about the growth of the disciples. But growth brings problems, doesn't it? A lot of pastors of big churches say big church, big problems. And so, problems start to develop here.

It says, *Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews.* So, the word complaint there basically means murmuring. Smoldering discontent. So, there was an issue that was going on that ran the risk of dividing the church. And so, this is what I would call the second internal attack against the church. And as we've been going through these early chapters in the book of Acts, there's external attack, internal attack, external attack, internal attack. The external attack was the arrest of Peter and John in chapters 3 and 4. The internal attack in Acts 5:1-11, is the Ananias and Sapphira incident, which we've studied. And then there's an external attack with the arrest of the apostles, which we finished last quarter, the rest of chapter 5. Now, here comes an internal attack with a potential schism, because there's smoldering resentment about an

issue. And then once that gets resolved, you move into chapter 6:8 through the end of chapter 7 and into the beginning of chapter 8, where you learn of the first martyr of the church age. A man named Stephen, the first deacon, is martyred, and that leads to a persecution against the church that finally pushes them out of Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria. So that's an external attack.

So, Satan is always at work trying to destroy the church from without. And if that doesn't work, he'll try to destroy the church from within. And when you're in ministry long enough, you see this over and over again. External attack, internal attack, external attack, internal attack, etc... And so that's what's happening here. So, what is the issue here? Well, some widows are being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. In other words, some widows are being neglected and the Bible always holds out, Old Testament and New Testament, that we should give special care to widows.

Deuteronomy, Old Testament under Israel, chapter 14:29, it says: *The Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance among you, and the alien, the orphan and the widow who are in your town, shall come and eat and be satisfied, in order that the Lord your God may bless you and all the work of your hand which you do.* God is looking out economically for widows in the book of Deuteronomy. Same thing in Deuteronomy 14:19, Deuteronomy 26:12.

This is why Jesus is upset with the Pharisees, Mark 12:38-40, because they were devouring widows' houses. Instead of looking out for widows, they were taking financial advantage of widows. James 1:27 says, *Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.* So how do you know you're keeping yourself unstained by the world? And you're practicing what James calls pure religion? Well, you have a tendency to look out for those that are most vulnerable. Orphans, those who have no parents; and widows-- woman, elderly woman particularly that has no husband. Husband deceased. Over in First Timothy 5:1-16, there's a long section there about widows and how to take care of widows. First Timothy 5:4 says, *but if any widow has children or grandchildren, they must first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God.* In other words, the widow is to be taken care of by her family. But what if she has no family? Well, there's this long list of qualifications that she is to have, and if she's to have them, she's to be put on the list. First Timothy 5:9 says, *A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not*

*less than sixty years old, having been the wife of one man...* "Put on the list" means she's qualified for financial assistance.

So, all of this demonstrates God's heart and care for the vulnerable, in this case, the widows. So, these widows were being neglected somehow. And how are they being neglected? As the church was growing, they were being neglected. End of verse 1, in the daily serving of food. So, when you study the early church-- particularly people that had come to Jerusalem just to be in town for a short while to participate in Pentecost and then to go back home; they didn't realize that the Holy Spirit had a surprise for them. That the spirit was going to start the church in Acts 2. So, a lot of them came, they heard Peter preach, and they got saved. And they wanted to learn this new way of life called Christianity. The problem is they only had resources for a short while, but they wanted to stay and sit at the apostles' feet and learn doctrine. There's no Bibles yet, so they can't just go home and read their Bible. So, it was causing a financial problem. And so those within the Jerusalem church that had resources would liquidate their assets to have money on hand to help these out-of-towners. And that's how all these needs were met in the early church. We've already studied that happening in Acts 2:43-45. We saw it again in Acts 4:32-35.

Paul writes in First Timothy 5:11, *But refuse to put younger widows on the list, for when they feel sensual desires in disregard to Christ, they want to get married.* So over there in First Timothy 5, there's all these restrictions about what widows qualify for financial aid within the church, which ones don't. But he talks about putting some widows on a list. The list is qualification. You're qualified to receive financial help from the church. So, what was happening is some of these widows were being overlooked. Some were given preferential treatment; some were being overlooked. And the dispute is between-- and you see it there in verse 1-- between the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So, as I mentioned before, there are many people that came from out of town. We call them Diaspora Jews. Jews not living within the Land of Israel. They came in Acts 2. They came just to celebrate Pentecost. They just had enough resources to be in town for a short period of time. And then they were going to go back to where they came from and where all these people came from. It's enumerated in Acts 2:9-11. But as I mentioned before that once the church was born and Peter preached and the Holy Spirit fell, they

wanted to stay and learn. So, it was creating a financial problem. And that's why you have this sharing going on in the early church.

- I. Appointment of the First Deacons (Acts 6:1-7)
  - A. Occasion (1)
  - B. **Apostles' advice (2-4)**
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  - D. Results (7)

Concerning the daily distribution of food for the diaspora Jews-- their widows were being neglected in this distribution. Now the native Hebrew widows, they were looked out for. But the Jews coming from out of town, their widows were being neglected. And it caused this sort of smoldering resentment. And you have a potential church split happening here. The Hellenistic Jews (the diaspora Jews) and the Greek Jews (from outside of the borders of Israel), they were basically feeling neglected, and their widows were feeling neglected because they *were* being neglected. All the resources were going to the widows of the native Israelis. So that is the circumstance that is happening here. And it's a very real problem. A lot of it is related to growth. Maybe some of it was related to just discrimination. But it was a real problem. So, the Apostle's, verses 2 through 4, speak up and they give advice. And the advice is given there in verse 2. And this is where you see the beginning of deacons. It says: *So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the Word of God in order to serve tables."*

So, notice this expression here, *"the twelve summoned the congregation."* It's not the congregation summoning the twelve, it's the twelve summoning the congregation. In other words, the congregation made the twelve aware of what was happening. But the authority in terms of deciding what to do rested with the twelve. Now, why do I bring that up? It has to do with something called church polity. Or church government. And you should probably know that not all churches have the same philosophy of government that Sugar Land Bible Church has. There are at least three different kinds of church government. The first one is called-- this is the one I was reared in-- the Episcopalian bishop model; where a bishop, when I was an Episcopalian, presided over multiple parishes. And I was an acolyte or an altar boy in the Episcopalian church. And when the bishop would come and visit our parish, they would bring out this special chair, and

everybody would get nervous, you know. And my brother sat in the chair and got chewed out by the priest, I might add. It's just one of those things I remember from my upbringing. So that's basically the Episcopalian model. All these views claim scripture. They claim Acts 15 as their scripture, where the apostles made a decision that affected everybody. But that was the apostles. I mean, just because the apostles did-- the apostles did a lot of things that we don't do.

The second view is the congregational model. They think Acts 6:1-7 supports them because it'll say things in here like verse 5: *The statement found approval with the whole congregation*. So, the congregational model vests authority in the congregation. A lot of Baptist type churches are governed this way, where there's constant committees, constant votes, because the decision-making authority ultimately rests with the congregation. To me, congregational rule is a little bit like letting the inmates run the asylum, so to speak. Sorry to say it that way. But as we saw from Ephesians 4-- we already talked about it briefly-- there it is, second bullet point.

#### Purposes of the Local Church

- Glorify God (Eph 3:21)
- **Edify the saints (Eph 4:11-16)**
- Fulfill the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20)

One of the purposes of the church is to bring the saints to maturity. So, a congregational model is letting those being brought to maturity have some kind of governing authority over those bringing them to maturity. It's kind of like a child telling a parent what to do. That's the problem with the congregational model. But a lot of churches go that direction because this is the United States; one man, one vote, all that kind of stuff. The model that we here at Sugar Land Bible Church think best mirrors Scripture is the elder model. Where a flock is governed by a plurality of godly men. And when it comes to a final decision, it's that group that makes a final decision-- not some bishop over our church, not the flock that you're bringing to maturity. They don't have the final say, but this plurality of godly men. It's called the elder rule model.

As you go through the Bible, you'll see it mentioned over and over again. It's hard to miss, particularly the New Testament. For example, in Acts 20:17, Paul summoned the elders of the Ephesian church. And he said to them in Acts 20:28, *"Be on guard for*



*yourself and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the church of God which he purchased with His own blood."* So, guard, overseer, shepherd. That's a statement aimed at the elders, this plurality of godly men. First Timothy 4:14, Paul writes to Timothy and says, *Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery.* Not to be confused with Presbyterian. Presbytery there is a word for elder or elders. First Timothy 5:17, it says: *The elders-- plural-- who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially--* I like this one-- *especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.* Thank you, Lord. Titus 1:5, Paul writes to Titus, and he says: *For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders-- plural-- in every city, as I directed you.* So, that's basically our model of church government. We think we're following the New Testament better than these other models.

And I'm just one of-- let's see, we currently have six elders. I don't have the final say on everything. I have just one vote. The same equality as everyone else. I just probably have a little bit more influence in people's minds because I'm a teaching elder. I'm in front of people at Sugar Land Bible Church more than our other elders. But it doesn't mean I'm somehow better, more spiritual, more important. The elders at Sugar Land Bible Church can remove me any time they want to do it, really. And I think it should be that way because I have a sin nature. I could do some weird stuff and the elders could remove me. And that's what you call a plurality of elders. A lot of churches-- it's very sad for me to watch. It's almost like the pastor will say, you know, this church is a theocracy and my name is Theo, you know, kind of thing. There's a lot of churches out there, and if you look at how they're structured, it's the pastor who has total control and authority over everything. And there are times where I've wanted that, to be honest with you. It's always nice to be king for a day kind of thing. But as Lord Acton said, power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. And the pastor has the same proclivity towards a power grab that anybody else would have. And so, I think the Lord is very wise in distributing power or authority equally among the elders.

Doesn't say how many elders you have to have. When I came here, we had seven. now we have six. At one time, some of the guys that were here long before me told me they were running with just three. But it has to be some sort of some sort of plurality. So, our church is an elder-led model. But in our Constitution, there are some things that give the

congregation authority. For example, we cannot go into debt unless the congregation approves it. We cannot appoint elders unless they're voted on by the congregation. The congregation actually starts the elder nomination and deacon nomination process by nominating elders. So, we're primarily elder-led. But as you look at our Constitution, there are a few touches of congregational rule, which, you know, I don't have a problem with. I think that's healthy. So, my point in bringing up all of this is the people that are making the decision here, although it's pleasing to the congregation-- it's the apostles. The apostles are functioning as elders of the first church. So, they are apostles and elders of the Jerusalem Church simultaneously. It says there in verse 2: *So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples*-- why did they summon them? Well, as you keep reading, you see the apostles functioning as elders, giving some strong advice here. And they said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the Word of God in order to serve tables."

The concept in Greek is it wouldn't be fitting. It wouldn't be appropriate for us to leave our responsibilities and get involved in this distribution of food, to make sure that the diaspora widows are not neglected and are treated equally as the native Hebrew widows. It's not like the project was bad. Something had to be done here, but it just wouldn't be appropriate for the apostles functioning as elders to get involved in this project. Why not? Because it would hamper the ministry of the Word. And right there in verse 2, you'll see the word "word". And the word "word" keeps repeating itself all the way through this paragraph. As you go down to verse 4, it talks about the ministry of the word. That's the second reference. And as you look at verse 7, it says the word of God kept on spreading. So, there was a crisis of the word. If the apostles had gotten involved in waiting on tables and distributing food to the widows equally, they can't do everything. I mean, most people have absolutely no idea unless they've tried it, how much time it takes to put together a Bible study that's worth your time, let alone to do it three times a week. Let alone to do a podcast on top of it. I mean, it's like an all-consuming thing. It's all I do. Study, teach, study, teach. I'm not complaining. But it's just giving you a reality here.

And you pull elders out of that role, and you put them into something else-- well, suddenly there's only so many hours in the day. And you really don't have time to give yourself to the word and to studying and to the PowerPoints and things that we put together. And you kind of find yourself, you know, just kind of doing things at the last

minute, throwing it together. And then the flock of God is neglected because now it's a crisis of the word that the people aren't being fed. So, this is something that would have happened to the apostles and the elders had they been pulled into this particular task here. If you look at First Timothy 5:17-18 it says: *The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.* In other words, this is hard work doing this kind of a ministry. For the Scripture says, *"You shall not muzzle the ox--"* now I read that for the first time and said, who are you calling an ox here? *For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages."* In other words, if you put a teaching elder in a position where he has to pastor a church and then maintain a full-time job-- there's a lot of guys out there doing that out of financial necessity. They're my heroes. But it's hard on them with full time work, family responsibilities and teaching responsibilities.

So as God blesses a church, it's appropriate for a church to financially subsidize a teaching elder or a teaching pastor because the laborer is worthy of his wages. And if you get him involved in everything else-- because there are countless people that come to me and want me to be involved with this committee or that committee. And then if you're like me and you speak out on political issues, which I do sometimes, then they want you to go to this political meeting, that political meeting-- and I could do all that, but something would suffer. I mean, either my home life would suffer, or the teaching ministry here would suffer. So, learning to say no, that's a tough one for me. I'm kind of a type A personality. Go go go go go. But I'm not as young as I used to be. You guys notice a few gray hairs up here? And I'm not in my 40s anymore. I just turned 57 last year. I just don't sometimes have the energy I used to have. So, I have to say no because I want to stay within what God wants me to do, which is to feed the flock. Which is something you can't do when you're sidetracked everywhere else.

So, I'm in a learning curve just like everybody else. But here it's talking about the function of a teaching elder is to preach and teach the Bible. Not to be a Jesus CEO. I was looking at a well-known magazine, it was advertising for pastor. And this church wrote their MBA preferred, seminary not required. So, this is literally what it said. MBA, Masters of Business Administration preferred. Seminary not required. In other words, they want a guy to come in and really be a CEO rather than a pastor. He's kind of like a cruise director. Keep the Lawrence Welk music playing and keep everybody busy

running around and doing this and doing that. Got your organizational charts all set up, but there's not a lot of time anymore for actual studying the Bible and teaching it, not just once in a while, but doing it over and over and over again, which is what I think God is calling pastors to do. That's one of the reasons we're invested in Chafer Seminary, because that's one of their goals: to raise up teaching pastors. Pastors that can regularly open the Bible and teach it in a way that it feeds the flock of, of God. You see this in the Old Testament with Ezra the scribe. Ezra 7:10 says, *For Ezra-- this is the post-exilic time period after the Babylonian captivity. For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach His ordinances and statutes in Israel.* So, Ezra did three things. Look at the order. Number 1) Study the law, because you can't teach what you don't know. Number 2) practice it. Don't teach other people to do stuff that you're not, you know, applying in your own life. And then number 3) teach it. It doesn't say study, teach, practice. It says study, practice, teach. It doesn't say teach, then study and practice. There's an order here. Study. Apply it in your personal life. And then you're in a position to teach other people about it. So that's what elders really are supposed to be doing. And if they had got involved with widows, then they would have been pulled away from their primary task. So, they say in verse 2: *So the 12 summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the Word of God in order to serve tables."* The word "serve" is *diakonia*. And somebody tell me what word comes from *diakonia*. Deacon. So, if you want to know where deacons came from, there are people that the Holy Spirit would raise up within the body to take care of this widows issue. They would serve tables, make sure there's no neglect of the widows. And the word "serve," *diakonia*, verse 2, is where we get the word deacon. So, if you want to understand where deacons came from, it came from that word "serve" right there in verse 2.

So, the apostles give some advice. You've got to raise up a new group of people to resolve this widow's issue. Or 1) the church is going to split and, 2) we're going to be pulled away from what we're supposed to be doing: the ministry of the word. And then if you look at verse 3, they lay out the qualifications for deacons. They're all there in verse 3. Five qualifications. And it's kind of interesting, you know, when we few people are called to serve as a deacon, we ask them, do you meet the requirements in First Timothy 3? We always ask them that. but we don't ask them, have you met the requirements in Acts 6? So, if you want to know if you're qualified to be a deacon, it's Acts 6:3 and First Timothy 3:8-13. So, you've got to look at not just Timothy, but you've

got to look at this Acts passage. So, who are you going to get to take care of the widows issue? Verse 3: *"Therefore, brethren--"* see who's speaking? It's the apostles. They're in the driver's seat. The need was made aware to them by the congregation, but it's the apostles functioning as elders, making the decision. Somebody has to make a decision in an organization.

The Episcopalian model says the bishop makes the decision for a bunch of churches. The congregational model says you don't do anything unless the congregation approves. The elder led model says a plurality of godly men make the decision. And our Constitution calls for something called unselfish plurality, meaning there should be some kind of consensus that this is right, or we should do this or not do that. And it shouldn't be people just being flies in the ointment trying to stop progress, because they're not getting their way. Unselfish plurality is trying to seek what God wants. And it may not go exactly according to my preferences every time. But this is what God wants. And this is our consensus. Unselfish plurality. You guys should read this Sugar Land Bible church constitution. There's some good stuff in there. The people that put this church together had an awful lot on the ball going for them. I've been to more than a lot of churches where it's more of like a mob-ocracy.

So, verse 3: *"Therefore, brethren, select from among you. seven men--"* doesn't say seven women, does it? Well, that's politically incorrect right there. *"Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we--"* that's the apostles-- *"may put in charge of this task."*

So how do you qualify to be a deacon in the early church? Number 1, you had to be a believer. They had to be selected from the brethren, from this group of disciples. So, notice that not everyone is qualified. There are privileges within the body to some based on qualifications. Number 2, they had to be male. Now, when Paul lays out the qualifications for deacon in First Timothy 3:12, he says deacons must be husbands of only one wife. I don't know how a woman-- even in this trans sexuality that we're in today-- I don't know how a woman could be the husband of one wife. But it gets a little tricky because in 1 Timothy 3:11 it says, *Women --speaking of deacons-- must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.* And very good people like Doctor Thomas Constable say that opens the door for female deacons. Deaconess. Our church's view on it is that's speaking of the wife of a deacon. You don't

just appoint the deacon. You look at the deacon's wife. So, one of the questions we ask when we're calling someone as elders is, is your wife on board? Because at the end of the day, it's a team effort. So, we follow more of the Charles Ryrie approach, that "women" is a reference to the wife of the deacon. By the way, I should say this: women are the backbone of any church.

You have, Phoebe, Romans 16:1, a servant. But she was really not an office holder as best we can tell. She was just a servant. Christ's ministry was subsidized by women. Doctor Constable in his online notes has an appendix in the back of his First Timothy notes ([soniclight.com](http://soniclight.com)) where he lists in the Bible every time a woman did something for God, Genesis to Revelation. And you should read it. It's overwhelming. God uses women all the time. It's just that there are certain offices that are gender limited. Teaching pastor, being one. Elder being one. Our perspective is deacon being one of those offices. And this thing where the pastor gets up and preaches and his wife is called a co-pastor. And she gets up and exhorts-- No. There's there's nothing in the Bible that even comes close to that kind of thing. Yeah, but she's preaching under the authority of her husband. Well, have you heard some of these sermons these ladies are giving these days? The big church down the freeway, I won't mention its name, but you do see it on TV. His wife got into the pulpit and basically said, 'We're not here for God. We're here for us.' It's on YouTube. Watch it yourself. 'And when we're happy, God's happy.' I mean, that's like, as close to blasphemous as I can think of. So, if Anne ever comes up here and says something like that, well, might have some problems. And she would never do that. She's not just sitting in here, she's like in the back, back, back. But she's doing valuable things in this church. Amen? So, what I'm trying to get at is God uses women all the time. If you're a female and you want to be used at Sugar Land Bible Church, we say praise the Lord. But you also must understand that God Himself has put gender limitations on certain offices. By the way, you'll see why in First Timothy 2:11-15, which we're not getting into tonight.

But number one, they must be a believer. They must be male. They must be reputable because it says they must have a good reputation. So, they have to have a good reputation among the Christians and amongst the unsaved. Paul echoes this with elders anyway. First Timothy 3:7 says, he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. So, if you have a terrible reputation in Houston because you're bouncing checks like basketballs all over

Houston, and you have a bad reputation in the financial world or the banking community, then that's a disqualification for being either elder or deacon. There was a circumstance here-- this was before I came here-- that one of our elders, who's moved now, made me aware about a guy that would just publicly berate his travel agent. Anything went wrong, he would, like, yell and scream and berate the guy. And his name came up to be a potential elder or deacon and, fortunately, this church turned that nomination down because he didn't have a good reputation amongst the unsaved world because of how he was conducting himself.

And number four, he has to be spiritual. In other words, full of the spirit. Spiritual. He has to be walking out the principles of the spiritual man. First Corinthians 3:1-3. Paul says, *And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people, but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food: for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?* Paul takes the world and divides it into two: saved and unsaved.

Unbelievers, natural man. But then there are the believers. Now most people stop right there. But Paul says, no, I'm going to keep drawing my pie chart. We're going to take the world of the saved (light green, right side of the circle) and we're going to divide it into three groups. There is the spiritual man. *Pneumatikos* - spiritual. By the way, that's the name of our journal, Chafer Seminary-- we're coming out with our journal. First edition after not being in circulation for a long time is coming out. And we're going to call it *pneumatikos*, named after Lewis Sperry Chafer's belief of He that is spiritual which is a phenomenal book to read because it shows you and teaches on this division that Paul is making here.

So, you got the spiritual believer, the growing believer. These are people that will bless your socks off. Then you've got the infants. Because you'll notice in First Corinthians 3:1-3 (I've got them in yellow, Paul uses all these different words). You've got the infants. Those are people that are sort of doing things that are age appropriate. So it's cute. I mean, when a toddler sucks their thumb, that's cute. When they're 16, it's not cute anymore. Amen? But you have the infants there, new Christians. They're doing age-appropriate things. And then you've got the carnal. Carnal means devoted to the flesh. That's where we get the word carnivorous, meat-eater from. Or maybe you've had some chili con carne lately. Some chili with meat. Carnal, meat. They're devoted to the

flesh. They're saved. They're going to heaven. Praise the Lord. But they keep catering to the sin nature. How do you know they're catering to the sin nature? Because you can see it. There's envy, strife and divisions. Clear indicator that people who have been saved for years should have grown up a long time ago. They should have claimed their resources in Christ. They should have started to develop a lifestyle that's not sinless, but is sinning less.

So, who do you put in a position of elder? Certainly not an unbeliever. Certainly not a carnal or infant. In fact, Paul says, don't lay hands on someone that's a brand new Christian lest they fall into the condemnation of the devil. You put people in positions of elder and deacon that are the spiritual man, spiritual believers, he that is spiritual. Not sinless, but sinning less. And so that's what it means here when it says they have to be full of the spirit, the spiritual man. And then [Acts 6:3] says... full of the Spirit and of wisdom. The Greek word for wisdom is *sophia*. It's a beautiful name for a female, Sophia. It basically means wisdom. Notice that it doesn't say *gnósis*. *Gnósis* is knowledge. It, says *sophia*, which is wisdom. Well, what's the difference? Knowledge is data in the head. Which is a good thing to have, by the way, because you can't apply what you don't know. So, it's a wonderful thing to learn truths about God and the Bible. But *gnósis* is not enough to become an elder or a deacon. You also have to have *sophia*. You have to be able to take that knowledge and apply it to life. So you learn, James 3, about the tongue and how it needs to be tamed. That's knowledge. Then the opportunity at your place of work comes up to gossip about someone and you say, you know what? I'm not going to do that. Now we just don't have *gnósis*, we have *sophia*. We have wisdom. Because you took James chapter 3, and you applied it to your own time. Bridling our own tongue.

Not down on knowledge at all. The deacon has to hold to the mystery, First Timothy 3:9 *holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience*. Elders also Titus 1:5. What does an elder have to be able to do? Titus 1:9 *...both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict*. You want to be an elder? You have to be able to not just know sound doctrine, but know it well enough to refute false doctrine when you see it. You want to be a deacon? You don't just have to hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience, but you have to have a lifestyle where you're perpetually applying it to yourself. When I first came here, we had a fellow that was a deacon and he was sort of getting into small groups, some of the smaller Sunday school classes. Men's group,



things like that. And he was badmouthing, all of the time, the doctrine of the Rapture. How church leadership was wrong. Sugar Land Bible church constitution is wrong because...you know. He was always attacking or kind of introducing it all the time into discussion, you know. Putting down the pre-trib rapture. Well, obviously that individual, if that had been known, should have never been put in any position because that would violate First Timothy 3:9, holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

I mean, if you're anti-what we believe to be biblically true, then you shouldn't be in a position of deacon, let alone an elder. And if you're publicly going around and you're, you know, sort of attacking or bashing or bringing into criticism constantly a doctrine that we believe in, like the pre-tribulational rapture, then you shouldn't be in the position of deacon. You have to be a person of *gnósis*. You have to be a person of *sophia*. By the way, that's how the book of Ephesians is divided. Chapters 1 through 3 are knowledge. There's no commands in chapters 1 through 3. Knowledge, knowledge, knowledge. Praise the Lord. Drink it in. It's wonderful. But then you get to chapter 4:1 and it says "therefore." Uh oh. Whenever Paul uses the word "therefore" you should ask "what is the word "therefore" there for?" And in Ephesians and also in Galatians and Romans, it transitions the believer from Orthodoxy to Orthopraxy. Orthodoxy, correct belief. Orthopraxy, correct practice. From *gnósis* to *sophia*. And you have there thirty-eight commands. We call them in Greek imperative. Thirty-eight imperatives. You have no imperatives in chapters 1 through 3, because Paul is trying to develop people in knowledge. But once they get knowledge, he says, here comes application.

Paul never tried to get people to apply something that they didn't know, so he taught them the truth. But he doesn't leave knowledge as the last resort. See, the high point of spirituality is not how many Bible studies you go to, how many verses you have memorized, how many times you've read through the Bible, how many times you've listened to series from your favorite pastors or teachers. That is not the high point of spirituality. The high point of spirituality is taking all that data-- which is wonderful to acquire, and God is in favor of that-- but now you're applying it to your life. As it goes from head to heart, now you're at the high point of spirituality. God never intended *gnósis* to be the last step. It's the first step. It's an important step. But it was intended to be turned into *sophia*. It was intended to be turned into what the Book of Proverbs calls *chokmah* in Hebrew, meaning wisdom. Ephesians 1 through 3, relationship. Ephesians 4 through 6, responsibility. First part of the book, doctrine. Second part of the book,

deed. First part of the book, Orthodoxy. Second part of the book, Orthopraxy. Ortho- means correct. You go to the orthodontist, you're getting your mouth corrected. Correct knowledge has to, at some point, become correct practice. First part of the book, knowledge, *gnósis*. Second part of the book, *sophia*, wisdom. First part of the book, belief. Second part of the book, behavior. First part of the book, position. Second part of the book, practice. First part of the book, privileges. Second part of the book, responsibility.

Who gets who gets to be a deacon? Someone who is not camped in Ephesians 1 through 3. They've gone through Ephesians 1 through 3. They know what's in Ephesians 1 through 3, but it's turned into Ephesians 4 through 6. That's who gets to be a deacon. And just concluding here. With the last part of verse three "...*whom we--*" that's the apostles speaking "*--may put in charge of this task.*" What task? The distribution of food to the widows and making sure that the Diaspora Jew widows are not overlooked. This is how the office of deacon started. Notice this nominated by the congregation. Kind of like we do it here. We take nominations, but appointed by the apostles who were functioning as elders of the first church in Jerusalem. So, I thought we could make it through verse 7. But we didn't quite get there, did we? So, we'll do verses 4 through 7 next time.