Church Organization

The Deacon

The church of Jesus Christ has organization on a local level (Acts 14:23; I Pet. 5:2). The word “organization” is defined as “something comprising elements with varied functions that contribute to the whole and to collective functions; organism” (AHD pg. 876). The elements of the Lord’s church are the saints, bishops and deacons. Paul addressed the officials in Philippians 1:1 saying, “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus that are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.” Each of these elements has a function to perform that the work of the church may be accomplished. This article shall serve as a reminder as to what the office and function of the deacon is.

What is a Deacon in the Church?

The words “deacon,” “minister,” “servant,” and “administration” are found 191 times in the NT. The root word is *diakon* in 91 of these instances. Each time, service is the reoccurring definition. A willingness to serve (not be served) is the key to a successful deacon in the church. While the root word *diakon* is found a multitude of times in the NT, we find it associated with the office of a deacon only five times (three nouns and two verbs). The noun use of *diakon* is uniformly conjugated as masculine in these verses, indicating a gender-specific office (cf. Friberg’s Analytical Greek New Testament on Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 3:8, 12). These men must meet the qualifications outlined in I Timothy 3:8-13. The deacon is an official servant that is willing to give unselfishly of himself that the work of the church may continue.

What does a Deacon Do?

Deacons serve in the church (I Tim. 3:13). The capacity of their work may be discovered by examining the Greek words for “serve” that are equivalent to the five uses of the Greek word *diakon* in connection to the deacon as discussed above. The deacons’ work is primarily spiritual and secondly physical. There are three primary areas of work for the deacon. First, the deacon is to be a teacher of the gospel message (I Cor. 3:5; II Cor. 3:1-11; 6:4; 11:15; Gal. 2:7). Secondly, the deacon is one who executes the commands of another (elders) as a lowly servant (Matt. 22:13; 23:11; Mk. 9:35, 10:43; Jn. 2:5, 9). The elders will examine the strengths of each deacon and delegate out work such as ordering teaching material, organizing classes, organizing worship, taping sermons, providing copies of tapes upon request, maintaining a web site and so forth that the work of the church may continue. Thirdly, the deacon will also be ready to meet the needs (food and the necessaries of life) of the poor and the sick among the congregation (Matt. 25:44; Mk. 1:31; Lk. 8:3, 10:40; Jn. 12:2; Acts 6:2; Rom. 15:25).

The Deacon is a Man with Opportunity:

The deacons’ work is not without reward. Paul said, “For they that have served well as deacons gain to themselves a good standing, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus” (I Tim. 3:13). The word “gain” (peripoieomai) means “to keep or save for oneself… to acquire, obtain” (LS 630). That which the deacons acquire is a “good standing and great boldness in the faith…” The good “standing” (bathmos) is “a step, degree” (LS 143). “A step, stair; metaphor. Grade of dignity, degree, rank, standing” (Moulton 64). “Win a good standing (or rank) for oneself” (AG 130). I Timothy 3:13 is the only place in the NT the word *bathmos* is found. This good step, degree, rank, or standing is in “the faith.” Clearly the rank obtained in faith is recognized by brethren. Secondly, the deacon obtains a “great boldness in the faith.” The word “boldness” (parrhesia) is “freespokenness,
openness, frankness” (LS 611). The word boldness is used in the NT to indicate unashamed clear preaching of the gospel and confidence therein (cf. Jn. 7:26; 16:25, 29; Acts 4:29; 28:31; II Cor. 3:12; Heb. 3:6, 10:35; I Jn. 2:28). Paul was saying that the grand benefit of being a deacon is having the respect and ear of the brethren. Said condition gives opportunity for open and frank preaching of the gospel that all need to hear. This benefit indicates that the deacon’s work is primarily spiritual and secondarily physical. He may not have all answers, but he humbly knows where to find spiritual answers. He is one who sets aside humanism and elevates divine revelation to the zenith of his life interest!

Conclusion

The deacons play an important role in the church. Their willingness to serve in the area of brethren’s spiritual and physical needs frees up the elders for their work of shepherding the flock. A strong church that upholds truth, edifies its members, preaches to the lost, grows numerically, wages war against error and remains impervious to the wiles of the devil is a church that is organized as God would have it.