

## Church of Christ in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – Lesson 6

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- 1 Corinthians 12 teaches us that every member of the Lord's church is important and is needed
  - Vs 12 – *“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.”*
    - We're all members of a single, unified body
    - The body will not function 100% properly if each and every member is not pulling his/her weight
  - Paul goes on to compare this to our physical bodies in the rest of this chapter (vs 12-31)
  - Vs 14-16 – *“For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body?”*
    - It doesn't matter how big or how small our roles may seem to be
    - They are all equal and the Lord's church needs you to perform your role
    - The preacher can't say that “I'm much more important, therefore I'm a one man show”
    - Similarly, the person who cuts the grass cannot claim “I am not needed, because nobody recognizes that I'm doing this”
    - It doesn't matter – the congregation of the Lord's church here needs you
  - And we need you to be present
  - Hebrews 10:24-25 – *“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”*
    - When you are not here, or when you are here and not using your talents, you deprive the rest of the congregation of the encouragement that you provide
    - Regardless of what your talent may be – big or small, you provide encouragement
- The elders may be in charge of shepherding the flock as we discussed last class, but they cannot do all the work themselves
  - The things you have the talent to do, use them in accordance with God's word and in accordance with the elders leadership
  - Mark 10:45 – *“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”*
    - Christ came to serve – our King came to be a servant
    - And that's what we must be as well as we talked in previous classes
  - Use your talents – encourage the brethren
  - Sometimes the elders need help with leading certain tasks – that's obviously where deacons come in
  - We're going to continue our discussion with the organization of the church by discussing deacons this class
- Let's begin with a brief summary of how we've gotten here
  - Classes 1-4 – we discussed some fundamental information

- How Christ is our king and the church is His kingdom
    - How we are servants in this kingdom
    - How there is but 1 kingdom (not many)
    - And how we become a member of His kingdom
  - Class 5 (last class) – we began a discussion on the organization of the church according to the Bible
    - Last class, we specifically discussed the eldership
    - This class, we discuss deacons
- Let's first discuss how the role of deacons is in accordance with God's organization of the church
- **Philippians 1:1-5**
  - The first thing I want to note is that Paul and Timothy greet the saints in Christ Jesus, the bishops, and the deacons in Philippi
  - The church in Philippi was organized with bishops and deacons
  - And according to vs 5 – the Philippian fellowship was in the gospel
  - So Paul and Timothy greet this organization and thank this organization
  - This organization is approved by God
  - Therefore, we must comply this organization today – this is the only church organization that is approved of God
  - Now who are the saints?
    - 1 Corinthians 1:2 – *“Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.”*
    - So saints are obviously those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus
    - Jude 1 – saints are preserved in Christ Jesus
    - Jude 3 – saints were the receivers of the faith (the new covenant)
    - Who has been sanctified in Christ Jesus, preserved in Christ Jesus, and received the faith (the new covenant)?
    - 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 – *“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”*
    - Those who are sanctified are washed and justified
    - It is the members of the church
  - So the church at Philippi was organized with elders, deacons, and members of the church
  - This organization is God approved
- **Exodus 18:13-27**
  - Just like the eldership has OT roots, so does the idea of deacons
  - Here we read that Jethro (Moses' father-in-law) saw that Moses sat to judge the people and did so all day (from morning until evening – vs 13)

- And Jethro asks him why are you doing this alone? Why are you doing this by yourself when it is taking you all day to do it?
- Moses responds – they come to me to inquire of God. I make known to them the statutes of God and His laws
- And Jethro tells him what you are doing is not good
  - So informing people of God’s law is not a good thing?
  - Of course it is a good thing, that’s not what Jethro is saying
  - Jethro is telling Moses that it is not good that this is taking all of his time
  - God chose Moses to lead a nation and Jethro is telling him “all your time is being used on individual difficulties of people”
  - Now, this is clearly something that needs to be done
  - But for 1 person to do this all day when he has 1000’s of other responsibilities to be doing – Jethro tells Moses that this is not wise, you will wear yourself out
- Let’s keep these things in mind and look at NT principles here
  - Do you think it would be wise for the elders to spend all day, every day on 1 task?
  - We’ll talk about it more later, but Acts 6 would suggest that the answer to this question is no
  - We’re dealing with apostles in Acts 6 vs the eldership, but you can see the parallels
  - The elders are shepherding the flock, they are protecting the flock by keeping false doctrine away from the flock, while at the same time trying to figure out the best way in which the flock should go through the community and increase the flock
  - They do not always have time for each and every smaller matter
- Moses was attempting to do this – something that needed to be done
- But something that Moses could have delegated so he’d have more time to focus on the ‘bigger fish’ he needed to fry
  - Like leading the Israelites through the wilderness and into the promised land of Canaan
  - Immediately – such things as leading the Israelites to Mount Sinai and then scaling the mountain to receive the law from God
    - Jethro’s encounter with Moses here happened at Rephidim where they had just fended off the Amalekites (CH 17)
    - Rephidim was close to Mount Sinai, but apparently they still had just a little ways to go because CH 19 opens with Israel departing Rephidim and camping before the mountain (vs 2)
- Jethro tells Moses that he should still bring the difficulties before God, but that he should also teach Israel how to walk and the things in which they must do
  - Hosea 11:3 – God taught Israel how to walk
  - Apparently that was done via Moses and the law
- Furthermore Moses, select able men with the following qualities
  - They fear God
  - Men of truth

- Hate covetousness
  - Do these sound familiar? Perhaps Acts 6 or 1 Timothy 3
  - These were not just random men
  - Rather, they were men that Moses knew he could trust – and he knew that because of their fear of God
- Let these men deal with the smaller matters, freeing you up to only deal with the greater matters (vs 22)
- Vs 23 – *“If you do this thing, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people will also go to their place in peace.”*
  - Was this a command from God or just mere advice from Jethro?
  - *“If you do this thing, **and God so commands you...**”*
  - And then Moses takes Jethro’s advice – so therefore, it was a command from God
  - This provides a wonderful example of why we should heed the commands of God
  - Because you can see that Moses did in this example, and everything turned out great for him (vs 26)
  - This will be the case for us as well if we heed God’s commands
- Again, this is obviously an OT example, but you can see that Moses chose able men and godly men to help him with this specific task and it took burden off of Moses
- Think NT principles now – when deacons are appointed and elders assign them to specific tasks, it alleviates some of the elders burdens
- They are free to do other things that need to be done to satisfy their duty of shepherding the flock
  - So, deacons and members in general (but specifically deacons in this example) – take the tasks given to you by the elders seriously
  - Carry them out to the best of your ability
  - In doing so, you are developing trust amongst the elders and taking burden off of them
  - And you are ultimately serving the Lord
- Next, let’s look at the role of deacons
- **Mark 10:42-45**
  - Jesus says *“You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.”*
    - In other words, Jesus is saying that these rulers have the attitude of “Look at me – I am in charge, and you are not. Look at how great I am.”
  - Jesus says that shall not be the case amongst His people
  - As evident by 1 Peter 5:3 – *“nor as being lords over those entrusted to you”* written amongst the qualifications of men who wish to be elders
  - Rather, whoever desires to become great must be a servant
  - Even Jesus Himself, through whom all things were created (Colossians 1:16) did not come to be served, but to serve
    - And this must be the church’s mindset
    - Why? Because this was Christ’s mindset (Philippians 2)

- He made Himself poor, so that we may become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9)
- That's how much He loved us and that's how much we should love our fellow man
- Clearly, there is spiritual implications here – Christ was in heaven, and He came down to this earth? He was that rich, yet He made Himself that poor?
- Also, there are physical implications here – Christ's ministry had to be supported (Luke 8:3)
- Colossians 1:16 – *"...All things were created through Him and for Him."*
- He couldn't support Himself financially? At least not completely (Luke 8:3)
- That's who I'm supposed to be like?
- You're a servant, I'm a servant, deacons – you are servants
- What does this look like?
  - Philippians 4:8 – *"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things."*
- Deacons – take your role as servant seriously
- It is true, it is pure, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy to do so
- Jesus did it – He washed feet (John 13), He died on a cross (John 19)
  - You and I must do the same – deacons included
- Remember, we had to deduce just a little bit to find out if the Exodus 18 command was from God or if it was merely advice from Jethro
- Not so in the NT – it is much more plain
- Philippians 1:1-5 clearly demonstrated that the role of deacons is a part of His church today, but that was just an example
- Let's look at the command to establish deacons and the qualifications of them
- **1 Timothy 3:8-13**
  - Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, his true son in the faith (1 Timothy 1:2)
  - And Paul tells Timothy in vs 3 – *"As I urged you when I went into Macedonia – remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine"*
  - The purpose of Paul giving this command to Timothy and Timothy's execution was love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith (vs 5)
  - A role of the church (perhaps one that summarizes the church) is that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Matthew 22:37)
  - We can't do that if we aren't following God's instructions
    - If we put our own will above God's will in regards to how we worship, how we serve, how we organize the church, etc.
  - We've seen the example of deacons in the church organization in Philippians 1
  - And here, Paul tells Timothy that when deacons are appointed, they are to have these qualifications
    - Notice again that there is a plurality of deacons

- In the Exodus 18 example of those chosen to help Moses – Moses chose a plurality
  - Philippians 1 describes a plurality
  - Acts 6 describes a plurality of those chosen to help the apostles
- And their qualifications are the following
  - Reverent
    - They are to have a solemn respect for the Lord, His church, and His word
  - Not double-tongued
    - They are not to be deceitful or deceptive in any way
    - You can think of this as honesty
    - Remember brother John Croft’s lesson during the summer series, he accurately described deceitfulness as being dishonest
    - You can cite the example of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5
    - Can you lie to the Holy Spirit? You can try, but you won’t get away with it
    - They sold a piece of property for \$X, brought \$X-Y to the apostles feet proclaiming that was the full price and they suffered the consequences
    - Deacons should not have this quality
  - Not given to much wine
    - Ephesians 5:18 – *“Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,”*
    - Rather than having his fill of wine, a deacon is to have his fill of the Spirit
    - Again, as seen in Acts 6:3
  - Not greedy for money
    - This is actually something that has made it into a lot of my sermons lately
    - If you have a lust for money or anything in this world, you’re missing the bigger picture
    - In 2 Kings 6:8-17, Syria was at war with Israel
      - And the Syrian king wanted to get his hands on Elisha because Elisha was telling the king of Israel the things that the Syrian king speaks while in his bedroom (vs 12)
      - And they come to Dothan where Elisha was and surround his camp, frightening Elisha’s servant
      - And Elisha tells his servant *“Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”*
      - Elisha prayed that his servant’s eyes would be opened and when they were, the servant saw a mountain full of horses and chariots of fire
    - This world and the things therein are temporal
    - A deacon must not allow these things (specifically money in this case) to get in his way of eternity (1 Timothy 6:10)
    - The eyes of the deacon must be on the eternal things, not the things of this life (2 Corinthians 4:18)
  - Holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience

- What is the mystery of faith?
- That the redemption through Christ is not for Jews only, but for the Gentiles as well – for everyone
- Hold on to this with a pure conscience
- Do not deny the Gentiles
- Let these men be tested – they are to have some level of maturity
  - James 1:2-3 – *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.”*
  - Deacons need not to be as mature as elders, but they need to have some maturity
  - They need to have been through some testing of their faith, because deacons will need to have patience as they execute the tasks in which they are given
- They must have faithful wives
- In addition to this, men serving as deacons are to rule their households well
  - The logic – if a man cannot rule his house well, how can he serve in a role in the church and expect it to go well (1 Timothy 3:5)
- This section of 1 Timothy concludes by saying that the role of a deacon, if served well – is admirable in the faith in Christ Jesus
- Take this role seriously deacons – you are serving in Christ’s church before Christ Himself
- And if it is admirable to serve well before Christ, logic dictates that it is not admirable to serve poorly before Christ
- Finally, let’s look at an example
- Acts 6:1-7
  - The number of disciples were growing quickly in Jerusalem
  - But as a result, widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food
  - When a woman became a widow in the gathering of the disciples in Jerusalem here, it is evident that it was the responsibility of the church to take care of her
    - This responsibility rightfully fell on the church when the widow in question had no children or grandchildren
    - 1 Timothy 5:3-5 – *“Honor widows who are really widows. But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God. Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day.”*
    - Obviously, if this woman had children or grandchildren – they were to be the primary caregivers and providers
      - Repaying their parents for the kindness they were shown before being widowed
    - But if the woman had no children or grandchildren and her husband died, she was to turn to the church – she was to trust in God and continue in supplications and prayers
    - So the responsibility of taking care of widows was a big deal – where else could these women turn?

- And some of these widows were being neglected unintentionally
- The apostles gathered the disciples and told them “we need to focus on the word of God” – not that waiting on these widows is unnecessary, but rather it is taking time away from what we really need to be doing
  - They did not have the completed NT as we do today
  - 1 Corinthians 12-14 teaches us that the Holy Spirit would guide the early church through things such as worship services, etc. via miraculous gifts of prophecies, tongues with interpretations, etc.
  - And these miraculous gifts were given by the laying on of hands of the apostles
  - In Acts 15, when men from Judea came to Antioch teaching that circumcision is still required, Paul and Barnabas took these men to the elders and apostles in Jerusalem to handle this matter
    - Now, Paul and Barnabas were apostles (Acts 14)
    - They could have handled this themselves
    - 1 – these men apparently were not listening to Paul and Barnabas
    - 2 – going to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem would have settled the matter once and for all
    - This letter that they received from the apostles in Jerusalem – they could send to wherever this dispute would arise in the future
- That type of thing is what the apostles needed to be doing
- Not that waiting on these widow’s tables was unimportant – they just had bigger fish to fry
  - As Moses did in Exodus 18
- So they appoint 7 men with the following qualifications
  - Good reputation
  - Full of the Holy Spirit
  - Full of wisdom
  - Sound familiar? 1 Timothy 3 perhaps, Exodus 18 perhaps
- These 7 men became responsible for the task of distributing food daily
- While the apostles continued in prayer and in the ministry
- And God blessed this arrangement
  - Vs 7 – *“Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem...”*
- I hope that you are convinced that deacons are a critical role in the organization of the church
- God has established this role and we must respect that
- Deacons – take your responsibility seriously and serve to the best of your ability
  - You are serving before Christ