

# ANTIOCH BIBLE CLASS

LESSON SUBJECT

## THE OFFICE OF DEACON

SCRIPTURE TEXT: ACTS 6:1-15; I TIM. 3:8-15

MEMORY VERSE: ACTS 6:3. Wherefore brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, who we may appoint over this business.

### INTRODUCTION:

This lesson presents a new opportunity and a new responsibility for the church. One of the most outstanding characteristics accompanying the new church was that of generosity beyond what anyone could imagine. Many of them had possessions which they sold and delivered the proceeds to the church for distribution as there was need. It is clear that these proceeds did not go to make up salaries for the apostles and other ministers of the gospel. It was used primarily for the needs of people who were less fortunate and could not take care of their daily needs. This was unheard of in the pagan, Roman world: a group of people whose benevolence is so great that they are concerned for others beyond their own. Obviously the need was great; even greater than they were able to handle, either financially or physically. There arose those who felt that they were being neglected in the "daily ministrations". When this came to the attention of the apostles, they took action. They could not consume their time with the administration of this daily business because that would take away precious time needed for prayer and preaching. These were the two cornerstones of the work of the gospel. We have gotten away from that example. The apostles advised that seven men be selected, which they might appoint over this business. These are known as the first deacons of the church. Different denominations have different by-laws for selecting people and what they call them, for services to the church beyond the ministry of the gospel. There is also different authority assigned or either assumed for these offices. In some cases the "deacon board" is presumed to run the whole church, including the hiring and firing of the preacher. In other cases, they are relegated to mere detail work without any element of spiritual service. I believe that the important thing to keep in mind in this area is, what is the need of the church and how can it best be served. Being a deacon is not a "position" handed out so that everyone can have a "part" in the church's official business. In every case it should be looked upon first of all with the spiritual work of the church uppermost in mind, with "deacons" aiding, but not controlling the most important area of church function. The fact that the first deacons selected were also capable of spiritual ministry tells you that the church was very careful to select those who met the criteria which the apostles had specified. Sometimes circumstances may not allow you the luxury of doing all that you would like, but in no case would it be practical to go out beyond the local church to find this kind of servant.

## DAILY SCRIPTURE READINGS AND THOUGHTS

### MONDAY: ACTS 6:1-3. SOLVING CHURCH PROBLEMS.

#### SCRIPTURE.

V1. And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. 2. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, it is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. 3. Wherefore brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

#### COMMENTS.

The problem faced here by the church could have become a real impediment to its purpose. It is serious and it must have a sober and spiritual solution. In order to handle this situation, seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, were to be selected for appointment by the apostles. It was not a matter for a novice or someone who was not a genuine, dedicated Christian. The criteria used for selection does not suggest that mere carnal qualifications were satisfactory. Any of God's business must be cared for by people who are dedicated to the Lord and the church.

### TUESDAY – ACTS 6:4. PREACHING AND PRAYER ARE PRIORITIES.

#### SCRIPTURE.

V4. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

#### COMMENTS.

The ministry of the gospel of salvation must not be overshadowed by secondary, business or personal needs. Reports show that a major cause of ministerial burn out and discontent among clergy is due to having to spend an inordinate amount of time as a "CEO" or in meetings or looking after the "business" of the church. All of these have their importance, but they must not encroach upon the basic, most vital function of the church, preaching and prayer. The apostles wisely saw this and called for the selection of Christians to take care of this "business" so that they would not have to "serve tables".

### WEDNESDAY – ACTS 6:5-7. THE FIRST DEACONS.

#### SCRIPTURE.

V5. And the saying pleased the whole multitude; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: 6. Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their

hands on them. 7. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly: and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

#### COMMENTS.

The names of the first deacons were: Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas. The seven selected from and by the church, and not some distant authority, were appointed to serve over the present daily needs. Their basic duty is to take care of the business of administering to the daily, physical needs of people. They had no vested authority to control other offices or functions of the church. Nevertheless, they were capable of ministry as demonstrated so well by Stephen and Philip. Their problem is solved; the word of God increased; their number is multiplied, with even some of the priests being converted.

#### THURSDAY – ACTS 6:8-15. A DEACON AT WORK.

#### SCRIPTURE.

V8. And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. 9. Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. 10. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. 11. Then they suborned men which said we have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. 12. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council. 13. And set up false witnesses, which said, this man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: 14. For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. 15. And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

#### COMMENTS.

The fact that the responsibility of administering daily needs was given to the deacons does not mean they could not serve in other matters, as God would direct. And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles. Some religious sects, who apparently had no faith in Christ, disputed with Stephen and his message. However, they were not able to disprove his teaching about Christ, so they hatched up ridiculous accusations against him. Sadly, truth is not what tradition wants; only vain doctrines of men will satisfy.

#### FRIDAY – I TIM. 3:8-15. QUALIFICATIONS FOR DEACONS.

#### SCRIPTURE.

V8. Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; 9. Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. 10. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. 11. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober; faithful in all things. 12. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife,

ruling their children and their own houses well. 13. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree; and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. 14. These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: 15. But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

#### COMMENTS.

The qualifications listed in these scriptures show us the optimum standards by which each deacon should be called. They include:

- a. Grave, faithful speech, no drinker, not selfish;
- b. One who follows faith in Christ out of a pure and unpretentious conscience;
- c. They should be people who have proven their faithfulness and service;
- d. They should have a well respected and acceptable home life.

It can be seen from these that a deacon is not an office that you pass out just to give someone a title, but that real meaning and integrity are a necessary part of it. Everyone should aspire to these qualifications.

#### SUMMARY

It was important that the daily duties towards the people of the church and community be cared for. It was not possible for the apostles to handle all of these duties and also give their best efforts to prayer and preaching. Good and godly men were selected and set apart for this service. There is afterwards much written about Stephen and Phillip and their further contributions to the work of the gospel. That does not mean that the other deacons did not serve in their duties just as well. There is much work in a church life to be done. It should be carried on faithfully by dedicated Christian "servants" (deacon = deakeneo = to serve or be an attendant). Don't expect the preacher to be the "chief, cook and bottle washer". Preaching and prayer is a much heavier load than the average Christian realizes. The story of the grain farmer emphasizes this. It seems that when the successful grain farmer realized that the preacher only took 30 minutes to deliver his sermon, he proceeded to tell the preacher that he thought that he was being paid too much for his services. Next week the preacher appeared at the grain terminal where the farmer was unloading a load of grain for which he received \$5000. The preacher exclaimed that this looked like a lot of money for just unloading one load of grain. The farmer responded that the preacher did not understand just how much work it took to grow that one load of grain and that he was hardly making ends meet with what he received for it. The preacher then proceeded to explain how much work was needed in order to prepare a 30 minute message and the farmer had a different concept of the pay the preacher received.

No matter what other duties or opportunities may befall a church, nothing should impede the work of preaching and prayer and the entire church should give its full support to this essential work.

### QUESTIONS

1. What was the present, pressing need that necessitated the appointment of deacons?
2. What needs and duties of your church can you see that should not be the responsibility of the minister? Make a list.
3. Discuss the importance of this service as it relates to the overall mission of the church.
4. How did Stephen exemplify his qualifications for this office?
5. Discuss the characteristics a prospective deacon should seek to develop in their life.

### NOTES