

# THE DEACONSHIP

No authority questions it being apostolic to have an officer of the church known as deacon. But in no one particular have the Primitive Baptists, and all religious organizations, come so near disregarding the apostolic mark as in the use of this office.

As to being apostolic, Catholics and Protestants can make no showing doctrinally, as compared with the Primitive Baptists; but when it comes to this one office of the church, though Arminian bodies have generally disregarded the power and degree of the office, and the Primitive Baptists in this particular make a better showing, yet when it comes to the practical work of the office we find our people have fallen far short, and in many places have practically abolished the office, except in form. Primitive Baptist churches, claiming to be the churches of Jesus Christ, should have a better record than this. We should not only be apostolic in doctrine, but in practice as well. When there is apostolic authority for but two classes of church officers, then for us to abolish one of them in practice, is departing too far for those who love the doctrine of grace, and who would prove that they love the Master by keeping His commandments.

Some may question these statements being warranted, but ministers who are acquainted with the practice of the churches, and who have given the matter proper study, know that the facts sustain them. These pages have been written to call attention to practices undoubtedly authorized and commanded by the scriptures. To this end I wish to examine the office of the deaconship in the light of the Sacred Word and try to point out to the best of my ability a course approved by it.

First, I would like to engage the attention of the reader with the importance of the subject. Suppose some person should assert that sprinkling is just as good as immersion for baptism. What answer would a Primitive Baptist make? No doubt he would say, "Our Lord commanded believers to be baptized. Christ's own example shows that He understood baptism to be immersion in water, for He was baptized in the river Jordan and came up out of the water. Every allusion or example, so far as given, shows that the apostles and believers of their day understood baptism to be immersion. Since the apostles' time there has been no power authorized to change any doctrine or practice delivered to the church. So one who is not immersed cannot have Christian baptism, and if we receive anything else for baptism we at once lose our right to claim that we are churches of Jesus Christ, because we have a baptism that is not apostolic. So with the doctrines of the church. We contend that if a church departs from the doctrines of the Bible and persists in such error, she loses her identity with the church of Christ.

Now if some Arminian should turn these arguments against us and ask, "What was the work of the New Testament deacons?" and then ask if Primitive Baptist deacons do a like work, what would we say? Then if it should be urged that because of this lack, or error, we have not a right to call ourselves churches of Christ, what defense can we make, except we can truthfully say we still believe in the duties prescribed for deacons just as taught in the scriptures, and this difference in the practice of our deacons and New Testament deacons is only a temporary falling off or deviation and not because we have rejected the New Testament teaching ?

If the difference in practice arises because we have actually usurped the authority to change the duties of the office, as some have done, then the reason we assign for not recognizing the various organizations as churches of Jesus Christ, falls with dreadful weight upon us and denies our claim, too. But if we can be said to still hold the theory of the office as it was in the days of the apostles, and it is only the indifference of our members that causes us to fail in our practice, how can we expect the blessings of the Lord when we say, but do not do the things He has left on record for us to follow? Are not these considerations of sufficient weight to prompt us to an immediate investigation of God's word to see how our practice agrees with it.

I hope no one who reads these pages will feel that it makes no difference! In the eyes of Him who taught that we are to follow Him, every obedience and disobedience is important. We may look at ancient Israel and see this principle clearly taught, and no doubt their experiences are recorded that we may learn from them the real issues of life to the child of God. As we now view their journeyings we see what ingratitude it showed to God to depart from His laws, and bring in observances which He had positively forbidden. They no doubt felt at first when they went astray that it was of little consequence, and that God would not take notice of what they did to hold them to account for every violation. Sometimes, no doubt, they believed if their practice was according to the traditions of the elders, it would be all the justification needed. But when Christ came, how severe His denunciations of those who through tradition made void the word of God?

Beware, brethren, lest we take a course similar to that disobedient and stiff-necked people. We should remember our God is a jealous God and His glory He will not give to another. He will not allow His people to follow the traditions or heresies of men and pour His blessings upon their course. To do this would be to make His laws of no effect. If we may do them or not do them, and the result will be the same, then His laws are of no consequence. But Primitive Baptists can never admit such a theory as this. "He is our Lawgiver." There be lords many and gods many, but unto us there is one God ([1Co 8:5-6](#)).

If we have deacons we want New Testament deacons in practice. As our deacons fill an office recognized by God's word, they should do it in a manner approved by that authority. If our churches have gone astray upon this subject, they will have to repent—leave off the present practices—and return to that warranted by the word of God. We may expect to find opposition. Our people may follow tradition, and when they do so, they are as loth to give up such things as others; in fact they seem in some cases to hold to them with greater tenacity, for they get to thinking of their practice as being approved of God, and, generally, what an Old Baptist esteems as coming from God he does not readily give up, for we are taught to view His teachings with greater reverence than other people do.

So we cannot expect to see a change in a few days or months, or even years; it will require patience and continued effort for the truth. But no true soldier will falter on this account. It is our duty and our high privilege, to contend for the Lord's way and word and leave the result entirely in His hand. By reading the history of ancient Israel we may see that wrong practices often found their way in among them, and when they had to suffer for it, then they would be induced to put the evil away from them. May we not hope the Israel of our God will arise now and put every evil way behind her, and trusting in the God of Abraham, take His law as the only rule of faith

and practice? She should not be satisfied to merely believe the doctrine of grace, she should obey her Lord.

I come now to consider the office of the deaconship. The Greek word which is translated “deacon” in the New Testament means, servant, attendant, waiter. This word in its verbal and noun forms occurs one hundred one times in the New Testament, but it is only rendered “deacon” five times. It is rendered “minister” sixty-four times and “servant” twenty-one times. In its general meaning of ministering, it is applied to pious women ([Mt 27:55](#)), to brethren ([Mt 25:44](#)), to preachers ([Eph 6:21](#)), to apostles ([Ac 1:17](#)), to angels ([Mr 1:13](#)), and to Christ ([Mt 20:28](#)). But it is used in a special sense to indicate an officer of the New Testament church and should be used by us in the same way to denote the same thing today.

That there is another office besides that of elder indicates that other work is to be done besides ministering the word. To judge from the practice of some churches, only one officer is needed, (a preacher,) and he shorn of all power to look after the interest of the flock, except at communion time a deacon is needed to pass the bread and wine to the brethren. I will here state that I have never read a text of scripture, nor have I ever heard anyone use one that taught that the deacon, rather than any other person, should pass the bread and wine. Some refer to [Ac 6:2](#), where it is said by the apostle that it was not meet for the apostles to leave the word of God and “serve tables,” and these “tables” are taken to be the tables spread at the Lord’s supper, but it has no reference to such at all. The “tables” the apostles did not have time to serve, was daily ministering to the Grecian widows, who were being neglected because the disciples were multiplied. How much time is saved to the minister by the deacon passing the bread and wine? What does the minister do at that time that he could not do as well and pass the emblems himself? So far as I know this is the only passage referred to, and it is evident upon consideration that this had no reference whatever to the communion table. But as it is not stated

just who may, or who may not, assist at communion seasons, our custom of having the deacons to do so is not in violation of God’s word. But instead of this being their principal duty it is only one of the many things that may be laid upon them as being in harmony with the character of the work to be expected of deacons.

It would be more in keeping with the exact wording of our Lord when any brother has been served, for him to pass the bread or wine to another brother, so long as all are conveniently situated, and only call for the deacon’s assistance when brethren are not convenient to each other. As to providing the emblems, and the articles necessary for the communion, it is evident from the nature of the deacon’s work that he should do this. I will here remark that the objection of some deacons to passing the bread and wine at churches where they may be visiting, and are not acquainted with all the members, seems to be well taken, for they are liable to miss some, and to offer them to others who should not partake of them. I have known persons to take of the communion under such circumstances who were not members of the Old Baptist church at all. They had no scruples themselves, and took license from the fact that the emblems were passed to them. It is presumed that a deacon will know who is entitled to eat at his home church.

Coming to the occasion for the appointment of deacons in the apostolic church, it will be found that there was work for them to do, and of such character that it was necessary to select men

especially fitted to do it. This is one peculiarity of the church of Christ, work is to be done by persons especially fitted for it. The work of deacons was principally to handle and distribute money, or its equivalent. The militant church of Christ is made up of men and women who, though born of God, are subject to life's ills and needs, and He who has wisdom to build the earth and sky, and all things therein, did not set up His church and overlook this important fact. Christ affirms, "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things," and everything proves that He does, and that He who hears the ravens when they cry, and sees the sparrows when they fall, cares for us in all life's sufferings ([1Pe 5:7](#)).

I have heard unthinking brethren affirm that their church had no money system in it. While I feared they were telling the truth, I knew if it was true, their church, in that respect at least, was not apostolic. He who set up the church keeps all worlds in motion by laws that will never fail until His purpose has been worked out and He Himself shall bid it stop. Would He, who always went about doing good, healing the sick and relieving the distress of the poor, forget that there would be poor in the church in the ages then to come? O, no, for He said, The poor ye have with you always ([Mr 14:7](#)). Is the theory of men correct that Jesus made no arrangements for caring for the poor and distressed and keep up the ministry, and that now it is necessary to organize societies and helps for that purpose, the church not being adapted for such work?

No, a thousand times no. The church as set up by our Master is all complete and nothing lacking. And as the law He gave the sun shall keep it shining as long as He designs without having to be renewed, so the system He devised for equalizing the burdens among the members of the church of Christ will never need revision, nor that anything be added to it. We do not need ministerial boards nor aid societies that our ministers may give themselves to Him who has called them. The church in herself has every needed arrangement, and it will be found perfectly adequate to every emergency when our people trust in God and obey His word. We need never trouble ourselves to devise a plan for anything connected with the church of Christ, everything is already devised and laid down in God's word, and we may be sure if the plan we are following is not laid down there it will not be successful in the accomplishment of a Bible end.

Deacons were chosen to take charge of the funds of the church as a part of their work. Some question that the seven ([Ac 6:3](#)) were deacons. But from the fact that there were deacons in the churches later on, and no authority for the office is given except this in [Ac 6](#), and that the duty is set forth in that chapter and elsewhere is in harmony with the meaning of the word, I conclude that the seven were deacons.

That the church had a fund will appear from the fact that as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them and laid the price at the apostles' feet ([Ac 4:34-35](#)). From the common fund so formed the apostles made distribution to all as they had need. But the number of the disciples increased until the apostles were unable to see to the needs of all, and some of the Grecian widows were neglected. The apostles had also to preach, and there was not time to attend to both matters ([Ac 6:1](#)). As the work of caring for these widows was the express purpose for which the seven were set apart, it is certainly a legitimate conclusion that the church fund passed into their hands.

Even prior to the crucifixion of our Lord a common fund was provided as will be seen from the fact that when they sat at meat before Judas had betrayed our Lord, Judas was in charge of what money was needful for Jesus and the twelve. Some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, “Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or that he give something to the poor.”—[Joh 13:29](#).

From this we learn that Jesus had been training the disciples in the course they afterwards recommended to the church. Christ and His apostles had a common fund and they used it to supply their needs and to help the poor. If it had not been the practice to give to the poor out of that fund the disciples would not have thought that Judas had been told to do anything of the kind. Who supplied the fund we are not told, but as the disciples were all poor, and there is no record that they stopped to work, except when they went fishing, we may believe, without drawing very hard on our imagination, that there were friends of the cause of Christ who were in position to help and had liberal hearts. The fact that Judas had the purse, and was a devil, has nothing to do with its being right or wrong. Up to this time he had been a follower of Christ, and there is no proof that he did not do as the other disciples did. Judas followed Christ, but that does not make it wrong to be a follower of Christ.

Now if a church has no fund, and will not maintain one, it has no use for deacons. Any member may use his own funds for the relief of the needy, but it is the business of a deacon to use the funds of the church for that purpose. I have known churches to ordain deacons when it was not the intention of the members of the church to put anything into their hands, at any rate they did not. This is to trifle with solemn obligations and make much ado over form and deny the plain teachings of God’s word. If the elders of the churches who form presbyteries would be true to their convictions, they would say to the churches when called on in such cases, We will not use our authority to put a brother in an office knowing that you will withhold that from him which is necessary to the performance of his duty. To ordain a deacon in a church that will not keep any funds in his hands is to lay upon him a solemn responsibility and then have the church tie his hands and force him to non-compliance with the obligations of his office..

A brother chosen in a church to be deacon, knowing it had not been the practice of the church to keep any funds, and having reason to believe that unless they viewed the matter different to the general impression among the members, there would be nothing put into his hands, might well refuse to submit to ordination until there was a more scriptural understanding on the subject.

**These questions should be answered not only by the brother chosen deacon, but by the members of the church as well:**

**Is there necessity for deacons in the church?**

**What is the duty of the church to the deacon?**

**What is the duty of the deacon?**

**What are the qualifications of a deacon?**

With the view that there is no duty for the deacon but to assist at the communion, it cannot be made out that there is any necessity at all. As before stated, there is no passage of scripture indicating that any member of the church might not properly do the work the deacon usually does at the communion. If the view be taken that he is only to look after the spiritual interests of the members, then his place is more eminently filled by the ministry, and if there is necessity for more careful oversight, spiritually, then there should be more elders; or the pastor in charge should give himself more wholly to the work. From this standpoint there is no necessity whatever of choosing deacons.

The necessity, as it is stated in the New Testament, is to take charge of financial matters and look after the needs of the members of the church, being supplied with the means to do this by the voluntary contributions of the members. I repeat, if a church does not intend to keep funds in the hands of her deacons she does not need deacons. It may be said in reply to this that it is the duty of the deacons to look about and see if there are any poor, or needed expenses, or if the pastor needs help, and report it to the church and get instructions what to do and receive supplies from the church.

I would say in the first place, to admit this view, a member who had but little judgment would make about as good a deacon as the one endowed with the greatest wisdom, for he would not be expected to exercise his judgment in any case, but must always wait until he has been directed just what to do, while the qualifications given indicate that he is to act on his own judgment. Then, in cases of immediate need, if the church met only once a month, as most of our churches do now, the needy brother or sister might pass in great suffering and distress beyond the need of anything ministered by human hands. But the objector to the fund suggests that in such case it would be the duty of the deacon to either contribute of his own means, or see the brethren and collect something.

This is purely an innovation on God's way, as set forth in the Acts of the Apostles, and the example of the Primitive church. Paul gave instruction that there be weekly collections, that when the time for the use of the funds arrived, there would need to be no collection taken ([1Co 16:2](#)). The deacon might be poor himself and not have enough to supply the needs of others, and it very often happens that very poor brethren are very prompt to do their duty, and make just as good deacons as any.

Further, if the deacon is just to make report to the church of cases of need, any brother can do that, and there is no necessity for a special appointment. The fact is this, it is the duty of all the members to report to the deacon.

A church cannot do in a proper way, and most likely will not do at all, the things done by apostolic churches, without active deacons. The Lord has nothing done except for good reason. If the church can do as well without deacons as with them, then what reason can be given for their appointment, unless the office is to be considered as ornamental rather than practical, simply a dignitary without a duty. Certainly it will be conceded by all who revere the sacred word that there must have been, and is yet, a necessity for the deaconship in the church, not simply that the church may say she has a deacon, but that the work of the deacon may be done. So a church should not be considered in complete working order until the work of the deacon is recognized

and carried out. When churches are organized after they have secured a pastor, and sometimes before, they choose deacons, the inference being, even when the statement is not made, that a church is not fully in working order without deacons. But it is clear in some cases that this is a mere recognition of the office, and not of the work of the office, for no attempt is made to make the deacon of any practical aid to the church and cause. We should look deeper than mere form. The fact that there were deacons in the apostolic church should be argument enough with Primitive Baptists that the office is necessary, and also if necessary then, necessary now, or else the apostolic church is not a pattern for all ages. This admission would let in all the innovations of the day, which no Primitive Baptist could agree to at all. As proof that there were deacons in the apostolic churches, see the following scriptures: [Ac 6:3-6](#); [Php 1:1](#); [1Ti 3:8-13](#).

So if we are to lay claim to apostolic form in our churches we must have deacons, and it is certainly of more importance to have the work of the office done than it is to have the officer.

As to the question, "What is the duty of the church to the deacon?" If the members of the church do not recognize that there is a binding duty, the office might as well remain vacant. It is not a duty to the man who is filling the office, but to the office work as a function of the church. We do not care for the hand or the foot as having any dignity of themselves, but because they are a part of the body, and without them the body would be maimed. So must the office of the deaconship be considered. Here is a function of the church to be performed through this office, and if she does not have this office, she either does not do the work, or does it in an unscriptural way. The church should not choose a brother as a deacon to honor the man, but to use him as a servant to carry out the full work of the church.

A church cannot raise a brother to the work of the ministry, that is God's work. But she can put any brother into the deaconship who has the qualifications, though there may be other brethren who are just as well fitted for the place who are not needed. God appoints the minister to do a special work, and the church appoints the deacon to carry out the active work that falls to the church as an organization.

A church has as much right to do away with baptism as it has to do away with the work of the church that is to be done through deacons. She may have deacons in form, and yet do away with the work of the deacon. If a member of the church has never done anything through the deacon's hands, that member has done away with the work of the deacon so far as he is concerned, and has committed as much of an offense against the Great Head of the church as though he had attempted to make void any thing else that belongs to the house of the Lord. Indeed, it is hard to say if there is anything else connected with the church, except it be the ministry of the word, but could be struck down with less hurt than this.

To appoint deacons and then ignore them in administering the financial part of the church's business is gross contempt for God's law as head of the church. It would be as though an Israelite of old had said, I will ignore the priest who is to minister in the temple and do the work myself. Many brethren make this statement in substance when they say they will not have the deacon to fill his office, but what they have to give they will give themselves.

If the apostolic church is to be taken as a pattern, (and if it is not we have none,) we must consider the deaconship as an office of God's own arranging and should hesitate as much to change it or abolish it as we would to change the doctrines given in the scriptures, and should feel that as great a curse will fall on us for the one as for the other. The deacon is the hand of the church that she stretches out to all who are in need, and to keep her affairs working in decency and in order.

Some brethren try to step behind this passage: "But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth," and conclude that what they do they must do very privately, not letting anyone know what they do, not even the deacon. This is plainly straining this passage to mean something it was never intended to mean at all. It is wrong to make a display among men, and these words of the Savior were spoken in condemnation of such a practice. In the same connection the Savior tells His disciples that when they pray they are to enter into their closets and pray in secret and not before men ([Mt 6:5](#)). Is it then wrong to pray in public? Most of our church rules say that our services ought to be opened by singing and prayer. According to this construction this would be wrong and no one ought to offer prayer in public. The absurdity of this construction at once appears.

It may be that brethren who have urged such a construction have done so, violating the true principle in their hearts. It may be they wanted the recipient to know just whose liberality he received, and they did not put it into the hands of the deacon, because then it would never be known by the recipient who made the contribution. Sometimes when there are several preachers at a meeting a brother wants his favorite preacher to know that he is appreciated, and prefers to give out of his own hand; for if it were given to the deacon it would be divided up and those who were in greatest need would get most, and his favorite would never know just how he had appreciated him. This is the very spirit our Lord was condemning, and the plea is a mere pretext.

If one is willing that his liberality should not be advertised, let him put his gifts in with the common funds in the deacon's hands. And meeting one's share of the church expenses is not alms giving, and should not be treated as charity—it is duty.

If the church is to feel as she ought toward the deaconship it must be viewed as God's way of attending to certain affairs, and must be sacredly guarded from those who would change or abolish it. If a brother be chosen by the church to be put into the deaconship it is right to know that the church rightly understands her obligations to the office, and is disposed to recognize them, before assuming obligations himself that he cannot discharge unless the church will first do her duty. A church should not consider the work of the deacon as apart from her own act, but every member should feel that God has made it his duty to do certain things, and that these things are to be done through the deaconship.

The scriptures teach that we must be baptized and then leaves us no discretion as to manner or mode of baptism—we must be dipped in water. Now it is the duty of members of the church to do certain things, and then it is specified that this is to be done through the deacon's hands. It is contempt for God and His word to say it can be done as well some other way. The duty of the church to the deaconship is such that it is open rebellion to say to the deacon, "Stand thou here,

we can do all there is to do without having need of thee.” What right has any member or individual to ignore or make void an office that has the approval of the Sacred Word.

The duty of the members to this office is such that they should hold all their possessions subject to the needs of the church, as did the saints in the time of the apostles. While it is not obligatory now, nor was it then, to sell one’s property and put it into a common fund, yet the principle is that each brother should be willing to support the cause with all he has, and to that end should keep sufficient funds in the hands of the deacons to discharge the obligations of their office.

It would appear strange that a church should ever set apart a member to a work when very few of the members understood clearly what that work was. But such might be the case. Every member should be able to answer the plain question, in choosing a deacon, “What is he to do?” The necessity for this will be apparent upon reflection. If the members of a church do not properly understand the duty of a deacon he will not be able to discharge his duty, if his performance in any way depends upon them, for they will not co-operate with him. So a brother, when chosen by a church to this office, might very properly demand of them what they expected him to do.

If the members only expected him to assist the pastor at the communion, and bear unkind criticism, as everyone put into any prominence must do, he might with good ground refuse to accept the responsibility because the church was not scriptural as to the duty of deacons.

No pastor should permit a church of his care to go into the selection of a deacon without thoroughly instructing them as to the duty of the deacon. Here is where many of our pastors confess error, and failure to discharge their obligation. Too often the only things considered are the moral qualifications of the deacon without respect to what the deacon is to do. How is it possible to decide on the qualifications of a person to an office without deciding what he is to do? Here is where many mistakes have been made. Often, if a brother is exemplary in his walk and character as a man and a Christian, he is considered fit to be put into the deacon’s office.

But a man might be well fitted to be a judge on the bench who would make a very poor farmer or merchant, and the scriptures consider this, and point out the special qualifications of a deacon. I appeal to every reader of these pages to decide in his own mind what a deacon is to do if he carries out the scriptural idea of the office. Certainly no member of the church should consider himself competent to enter into the choice of deacon without first defining to his own satisfaction the work of the deacon, and then considering the peculiar fitness of the brother who is to be set apart.

The work of the deacon needs to be decided upon and understood by all, that the brother chosen to the office may be impressed with the fact that certain things are expected of him, and knowing it is the mind of all that he is to do these things, he will feel a greater obligation to discharge his duty. For, if there is a diversity of opinion regarding his work, he can never act without the feeling that his course is disapproved by some, which is a very discouraging condition. But, if all the members are properly instructed, the deacon will feel encouraged to perform the duties of his office, knowing his work is known to all, and that a failure to do it will meet with criticism, while to act faithfully will endear him to all his brethren.

By reference to [Ac 6](#), it will be very clearly seen that he is to make distribution of the church funds to all who have need. None will contend that the church ought to neglect or overburden any of her members, but different brethren will propose different plans for equalizing the burdens and caring for all who should be ministered to. This is ignoring God's plan, and certainly His plan must be the best. Some say that each brother or sister must act for himself or herself, and minister to all whom they find who have need. Now, certainly, there is nothing in God's word that would stand in the way of anyone taking this course. But the members of churches are weak, human beings, and some who have plenty of means have little charity, and some who have great sympathy for the cause, and for the suffering, have but little means. So, if left to themselves, the burden will fall most unequally, for many, who are able to help, will evade any occasion of bearing the burden of others, leaving the few who are willing, whether able or not, to do whatever is done.

So it is evident that if the burdens of the church are to be equalized, and those who need help are to receive it, the New Testament plan is the only one that will meet all the conditions to be provided for. Here will be found a stimulus for those who have been blessed with plenty, but who have a covetous disposition; here will be found a check for those who are liberal beyond their means, and funds sufficient for the needs of all. Besides this, the pastor should have an efficient helper, one full of wisdom, leading an exemplary life before the members for them to follow, an officer of the church full of the Holy Ghost and faith. It is a wise provision of the Great Head of the church for equalizing the burdens among members that the means contributed by the members go into a common fund, of which the deacons have charge. The deacon will know whether a member is contributing according to his ability, not that it is with the deacon to say how much any member shall give, for the needs of the church are to be met by voluntary offerings, as were the necessary things for the tabernacle and its service; but he will know who are giving as the Lord has prospered them, and if they fail to do this after proper instruction, and reproof if necessary, they should be reported to the church as covetous, which is a grievous sin, and should be summarily dealt with.

“Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry; for which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience.”—[Col 3:5-6](#). Old Testament lessons teach us that an idolater is an abomination in the sight of God.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, “But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.”—[1Co 5:11](#). All the members of any church know it is wrong to tolerate a drunkard in the church. Well, the Sacred Writ couples drunkards and covetous people together as being of one class—a class on which the “wrath of God” cometh. Now the deacons, knowing who are covetous and who are not, it would be their duty, more than that of any other member, to labor with such an offender in this direction, and if need be, report him to the church.

Ananias and Sapphira were accused by the Apostle Peter. This was before the institution of the deaconship, and the funds of the church were in the hands of the apostles. Ananias and Sapphira professed before men that they were giving in all they had to give. So long as there was no use

for their goods they were under no obligation to part with them; but their sin was in withholding through a covetous disposition. Before the property was sold it was their own, and after it was sold the proceeds were theirs ([Ac 5:4](#)). But they evidently felt it would be commendable to give in all they had, and yet they loved what they had better than they did the cause of Christ. The church could make no demand as to the amount to be given, so these two lied to God and not to men.

**How many deacons have seen cases like this: Brethren professing to give all they were able to give, and yet the deacons knew that a covetous disposition was causing them to hold back what they ought to bestow?**

We should learn from this lesson in Acts that the principle upon which the church was founded is, that the possessions of all members ought to be held by them subject to the needs of their brethren and the good of the cause. This fact should be recognized by the deacons who should not be slow to call upon the members for funds to meet all needs. A brother who is one indeed, should be ready to divide his last crust, and if this spirit prevailed it would not be hard for the deacons to do their work. For the deacons to know there is need for distribution to the poor, or to the ministry, or to the sick, and yet have members who are well able to contribute to such purposes withhold their means, after an appeal from the deacons, is very discouraging, indeed; in fact, this is the greatest burden deacons have to bear. Finding that members fail and refuse to do their duty, the deacons grow indifferent to their work and the office falls into disuse.

When the deacons have reported a covetous person to the church he should be dealt with the same as for any other offense. And that covetous persons should be dealt with there can be no doubt whatever, if the scriptures are to be taken as a rule. As before remarked, if covetous persons were classed with drunkards, idolaters, etc., and dealt with accordingly, it would be better for the church and all the members. Of course the deacon will have to take gospel steps to bring such matters before the church, and when this is done the church should not regard this sin as a peculiarity of character that cannot be reached, for it stands in the way of the prosperity of the church by withholding that which is needed perhaps in the upholding of the ministry. Not that the pastor of a church should serve for a salary, or for the sake of money, but many of God's ministers are poor in this world's goods, and having families, it is impossible for them to give a great portion of their time to the ministry.

The apostles ordained deacons and put the funds of the church into their hands that the ministers might give themselves wholly to the work ([Ac 6:4](#)). With this thought on his mind the deacon will not feel that it is simply a personal matter between him and the brethren. To neglect his duty, and let brethren withhold from the church what they are able to give, if it is needed to assist the pastor that he may discharge his duty, is to give assent to a weakened service, and weakened for mere greed, too, and to actually become a party to breaking down the apostolic plan for keeping up a church and sustaining the ministry in its work. An important duty of deacons is to see that those who are able do not withhold their means because of covetousness.

Not only is it the business of the deacon to receive the funds contributed by the members, but that perfect confidence may be maintained, he should keep an accurate account of all he receives and all he pays out, and make his report to the church regularly. He need not report what each

member gives, but the whole amount received. But he should give the items as paid out. If the church desires it he may report items received. This is necessary, because the members must have every evidence of the integrity and honesty of the deacon. True, they might feel this at the time of his selection, but that this feeling may be maintained it will be found necessary that the members know what he does with the funds in his hands. If it is known that he keeps no account, they will feel that he himself does not know just in what condition the funds are, whether he has church funds on hand, or whether he has paid out more than has been put into his hands.

I knew a case in which a good brother's word was called in question. He said he had not received enough money for a certain purpose. Another brother, equally good, said from his knowledge he felt sure that he had, but said, "He keeps no account and forgets."

If the deacon keeps no account of the funds he receives, nor of what use he puts them to, it soon results in a falling off of the receipts, and necessitates making a collection every time there is occasion to defray any expenses.

Some churches follow this practice: The deacon calls on the brethren when he has need of any funds, such as to help the pastor or a visiting minister, or to pay church expenses, and collects only as much as may be needed and pays it all out at once. This practice is rather to be commended than for the members to ignore the deacon, but it falls short of meeting the necessities, and is not following the scriptural practice. One of the bad features is, there will often be need of money, and the members will not be present to collect from. The regular meeting time may be cold and stormy, or heavy rains or sickness may keep the members at home, but the faithful pastor is present. He meets two discouraging things —the members are not present and his expenses are not paid.

Then at the next meeting, if the members are present, they only contribute as much as though they had been present the meeting before, because there is no report whether the pastor's expenses were met or not, and he has it to bear. Now if the deacon kept an account of the church fund, he could report at any time before it was exhausted, and it would be the duty of the members to replenish it. Then, whether the members were present at a meeting or not, if the pastor were present he could be helped on his way. Or if there were need to help any poor person, or incidental church expense, the deacon would be prepared to meet it.

Another reason for keeping an account is for the convenience of the members. Many of our members are farmers, and do not have ready money at all times of the year, in fact, it may be the case with anyone that he is not at all times prepared to make a contribution; but there will be some time during the year when he could put in his share toward keeping up the church's expenses. He could then hand it to the deacon and his entry of it would show that this brother had given his proportional part. The deacon would then know not to call on him again until the other members had borne their part.

Here arises a very important question: What is each member's share? Or what should each pay? This is where most of the attempts to systematize the deacon's work break down. A member asks the deacon, "How much shall I contribute?" The deacon, feeling he has no right to set the amount for members to give, says, "O, I don't know, just what you feel like giving." The

member, feeling, perhaps, that it is not right to burden the church with surplus funds, or that the deacon will at once and for that occasion, pay out all he receives, whether it is actually needed or not, gives but little. The deacon can say nothing, though he knows if the other members do not do better, the amount needed will not be raised. In his heart the deacon knows what the member ought to give, and, perhaps, the member would be quite willing to give all that is needed, but because of a wrong system in attending to business, the church has not done its duty.

Now all this can be remedied if the deacon is allowed to, and will do his duty. Every deacon who is qualified for the office can estimate about what the yearly expenses of his church will be. He can tell how much the fuel will cost; he knows if there are any poor to be looked after regularly; he can estimate needed repairs about the building and grounds; he knows how much it will cost to have some one care for the house, and have it ready for services; he should know the circumstances of the pastor, and about how much such a church as his ought to contribute to him.

He should lay this before all the members of the church, and let each one say how much of it he is willing to give. These amounts he can enter on his book. If it is enough to meet the demands, well and good, and each one will know about what he is to do, and he can do it when it is convenient.

But if the amounts volunteered at the first do not cover probable expenses, the deacon can ask the members to reconsider the matter, and raise their contributions; or knowing the circumstances of all the members, he will suggest to those who have not been as liberal as their circumstances warrant, that they should give more to equalize the burden. When this matter has been arranged, the members can pay in the amounts they have agreed to give as soon as they have it, or the deacons may need it. The deacons should not wait until the funds are entirely exhausted before calling upon the members, nor should the members wait to be called on at all. They should try to make the work of the deacon as light as possible, and should not put him to the trouble of calling on them individually. Of course the members are privileged to make as many gifts outside of this church fund as they feel disposed.

Out of the funds in their hands the deacons should distribute to the poor. No poor member should be allowed to suffer for the necessities of life, nor for any needed comfort that the church is able to provide. Never should a brother or sister, who can possibly be cared for otherwise, be sent out to the poor house to be cared for by the general public. The church need not take upon herself the burden of caring for the poor outside of her membership, because the members pay taxes to care for these poor. But her own poor and afflicted should be looked after by the church, and it is the especial duty of the deacons to look after this work.

In the United States, outside of the cities, we have not many poor who are actually unable to care for themselves who have no relatives to look after their needs, so this is not a heavy burden on the churches. In some cases members may be lazy and imprudent, so the deacons should carefully investigate each case and report it fully to the church that their course may be approved.

The deacons should defray the necessary expenses of the church, such as providing fuel, employing a janitor and keeping up needed repairs. The practice of some churches making such

things a special order of the church is disregarding the deaconship, and results in neglect and often in dissatisfaction. It is an old saying, that what is everybody's business is nobody's business, and it often proves true. A pane of glass is broken in a window. The janitor did not break it, and is not obliged to put in a new one, as he probably will not get pay for caring for the house until the end of the year, and has no money with which to buy the glass except what is his own. He knows the deacons have no church money, and that there will have to be a collection taken, and perhaps if the glass is put in before the collection is taken, it may not be made at all. So he waits for the church to "take the matter up" and take up a collection before this small matter can be attended to.

Then the janitor is employed by the year, and whether he does his work well or not, no one feels disposed to speak to him about it, for the church, and not an individual employed him, and "individuals" do not want to be "too forward" in matters which concern others as well as themselves. Now if the deacons were held accountable for all these things, then there would not be so much neglect. Or if there were, the church would need new deacons. I will suggest to deacons, if they pay the janitor every month they will get better service, and they should see to it that the house is kept in proper order to make the congregation comfortable. The house should be kept clean, the seats free from dust, warmed in winter before the congregation assembles, and kept warm enough, but not too warm, proper ventilation being provided. If the person employed to look after these things does not attend to them properly, and will not be instructed to do so, get some one else. "Be not slothful in business."—[Ro 12:11](#). Keep the house and grounds in nice order, that it may be a pleasant and an inviting place. Some churches appoint an annual or semi-annual "house cleaning" when the members all come in to spend the day together, and to thoroughly clean the house, repair the fences, cut the grass, etc., and this is commendable, especially as it affords the members an opportunity of spending a day together.

The deacons should minister out of the church funds to the necessities of the pastor, and they must to a great degree determine how much is done for him. The pastor's circumstances and opportunities should be understood. The deacons should remember that a church cannot prosper without pastoral service, and they must provide for as efficient a service as possible.