

LESSON NINE

Deacons:

Many pastors today are reluctant to have deacons in their Church. And yet deacons are biblical and we are instructed that they are an integral part of the Church body.

The reluctance of many pastors to have deacons is because of the multitude of “horror stories” in which the “deacon board” has taken over the Church and forced the pastor out. This has happened and will continue to happen until pastors learn to choose qualified men to recommend as deacons and then train them in their true biblical role, both in their responsibilities and in their limitations.

This section of the textbook will clarify much of the misunderstandings concerning the diaconate and also give the pastors the ability to choose and train men properly for this position in the Church before he recommends them and they are voted into that position.

THE PASTOR AND DEACONS.

THE design of the diaconate evidently was, not that of a co-ordinate branch of church government, but a co-operative yet subordinate aid to the ministerial and pastoral functions. The deacons are to be helpers, counsellors and coadjutors to the pastor. Their special sphere of service is in the temporalities of the church ; by attending to which matters they relieve the pastor, and allow him to devote himself entirely to the ministry of the word, and to spiritual concerns. They also become advisers and helpers of the pastor in his work.

If the idea of the primitive church were carried out, to the deacons would doubtless be committed the department of secular church service now devolved on trustees. But prevailing usage has narrowed their sphere to the care of the poor and sick of the church, serving at the communion, a sort of cabinet council for the pastor, and a leading activity in the general concerns of the church.

There is not unfrequently serious complaint against deacons, that they occasion the pastor—and perhaps the church too—much embarrassment and vexation, by a desire for the pre-eminence, and an assumption of official authority. No doubt this sometimes happens, as it will happen with persons who are not deacons. But for the most part it is believed that

all difficulty can be avoided by a wise and prudent course on the part of the pastor and the church, and the diaconate be made to realize its original design, and become a greatly helpful and beneficent service in the furtherance of the gospel.

1. Great care should be used in the selection and election of deacons, that none but suitable men be put into office. This counsel cannot be too emphatically urged. Men never should be elected to the office, simply because there is a vacancy to be filled, nor because they themselves or their friends desire their election. Never, unless there is a service for them to perform; never unless there are persons whom the church, with some good degree of unanimity, believe to be fitted for the office; and never, without much prayer for divine guidance in the selection. The church can get along better without deacons, than with unfit deacons. To attempt to fill sacred offices by partisan zeal and party caucusing, is a scandal to the church and to religion.

2. If a man occupies the deacon's office who obstructs the church's work, and is a vexation and hindrance rather than a help—and if, by frank and faithful endeavor he cannot be brought into harmony with the spirit of his office—he should by the church be requested to resign. And if he will not resign, after much patient and prayerful effort, it is the right of the church, by vote, to declare his office vacant, and in due time to fill his place with some one else.

3. For the harmony of the church, as well as for his own comfort and usefulness, the pastor should avoid all conflicts with his deacons. He has more at

stake, if any question of prudence, propriety, or morality be raised, than they can have. Nor are conflicts necessary, except in very extreme cases.

4. On the contrary, if the pastor can have with him and supporting him a company of prudent, wise, and helpful deacons, it will give him great encouragement, and vast influence for good in his church. To secure this he should leave no proper means untried.

5. If the pastor can have his deacons meet with him, once a month, to look over the condition of the church, pray for its prosperity, and devise means for more effective work, it will ordinarily be of great advantage. Many difficulties can be privately and quietly corrected at their inception, and plans can be carefully matured before being presented to the body for its action.

6. But such meetings should not attempt to invade the prerogatives of the church, on any question of authority; nor to dispose of business which should come before the entire body. Nor would it be proper for the deacons to meet as a *board*, without the pastor's presence, and assume the right to act by themselves, as an independent official department in the church.

7. But any work specially committed to them by the church—as for instance the care of the poor—should not be needlessly interfered with by pastor or church. Yet both should be informed as to what they do, and the pastor should counsel and advise with them, as to the manner in which the work should be done.