

A SERVANT CHURCH

This morning, as the church gathers for worship, part of our time will be spent in recognizing the appointment of six men to serve the congregation as deacons. This is the culmination of efforts initiated by the elders several months ago to find additional men to serve in that capacity. After speaking with a number of men to see whether they were willing to serve, and whether or not there was any reason why they should not be appointed, two weeks ago, they put forth the names of these men: **Keith Chesser, Chris Gentry, John Habiger, Fidel Reyes, Jerry Schroeder, and Bob Weatherly.**

In putting forth those names the elders asked us, the congregation, to speak with these men if we had any concerns about their appointment to that work. To my knowledge, there were no concerns or objections expressed.

We are asking each of these men, in joining the men who already serve in that capacity to serve the church as a deacon. But what, exactly, does that mean? What is a deacon, what does they do?

As many of you know, the word deacon is one of those *transliterated* words in the Bible. A transliterated word is one in which the sound, but not the meaning is brought out in the translation. In the Greek language, from which our New Testaments were translated, the word for what these men are being asked to become is *diakonos*. So you can see, in the texts where this word is found, it was the sound, and not the meaning that was employed.

So what does the word *diakonos* mean? What is it that we are asking these men to be? Interestingly, in the Greek text, this word *diakonos* is found thirty times. Of that number, it is given as *deacon* only three times; twice in the 1 Timothy 3 passage, and once in Philippians 1:1. The rest of the time it is translated as *minister(s)* twenty times, and *servant(s)* seven times. I notice in some of the newer versions such as the NIV, that is almost reversed. It is translated as *servant(s)* 21 times, and *minister(s)* 4 times.

So clearly the basic idea associated with this word is that of a servant or minister. That's the idea I want to stress with today's lesson on *A Servant Church*.

I am sure you know and understand that as a congregation of Christ's church, that is what we are supposed to be—a servant church. Let me give you three reasons why I can say that.

We are supposed to be a servant church because Christ himself was a servant, and that is clear from both what he said and what he did.

In **Matthew 20, verses 20-28**, we read of an incident in the life of Jesus involving the mother of two of Jesus' apostles, James and John. She had come to Christ asking for special consideration for her two sons. When He established his kingdom, she wanted him to promise that her two sons would be given the privilege of sitting at his right and left hands. In other words, she

wanted them to have the top positions. When the other ten apostles heard about it, Matthew tells us they became indignant, and that is when Jesus stepped in and had a few things to say to all of them. Beginning in **verse 25**, Jesus said:

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 26) It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 27) and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, 28) even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

It wasn't very long afterwards that Jesus took a basin of water and a towel and washed the feet of the apostles, something they should have done, not only for each other but for him as well. This is in **John 13**. Beginning in **verse 12**, we read:

When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? 13) You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. 14) If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15) For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you."

The apostle Paul urges the Philippian Christians of the servant attitude they are to have because of the servant attitude manifested by Christ. In **2:5-7**, we read:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6) who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7) but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

We are supposed to be a servant church because Christ himself was a servant, and because the church is the body of Christ.

It is deeply concerning that so few people have an appreciation for what the church is and for what it means to be a part of the church. I am afraid the combination of biblical illiteracy and the influence of denominationalism have led most people to view the church as little more than a social organization that one can join or avoid according to their preference. That isn't the Biblical picture of the church at all, and in the language of scripture, Christ is the head of the body, which is the church. Paul really stressed that point in his letters to the churches in Colossae and Ephesus. Listen to these scriptures:

- **Colossians 1:18** *And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.*
- **Colossians 1:24** *Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church,*

- **Ephesians 1:22-23** And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23) which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.
- **Ephesians 4:15-16** Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16) from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.
- **Ephesians 5:23** For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

The story is told that during WWII, a church in Strasbourg, France was destroyed by the war that raged in its streets. Nothing was left of the church structure except a statue of Christ that was still standing beneath the rubble. It was unharmed except for both hands which were broken off. After the war as the people of the city and that church began to rebuild, the decision was made to leave the statue unrepaired with a new inscription. Translated it said: "Christ has no hands but our hands!"

The famous hymn writer, Annie Johnson Flint wrote a poem that was entitled, The World's Bible. If I may, allow me to read it for you:

Christ has no hands but our hands to do His work today
 He has no feet but our feet to lead men in the way
 He has no tongue but our tongue to tell men how He died
 He has no help but our help to bring them to His side.

We are the only Bible the careless world will read,
 We are the sinner's gospel; we are the scoffer's creed;
 We are the Lord's last message, given in word and deed;
 What if the type is crooked? What if the print is blurred?

What if our hands are busy with other work than His?
 What if our feet are walking where sin's allurements is?
 What if our tongue is speaking of things His lips would spurn?
 How can we hope to help Him or welcome His return?

Forty days after Passover, Christ ascended into heaven to take his place beside God the Father once again. Nevertheless, with the help of the Holy Spirit, Christ's ministry of redeeming the world continues to this day through His body, which is the church. If Christ was a servant and if the church is His body, then it stands to reason that the church is in the world as a servant also.

We are supposed to be a servant church because Christ himself was a servant and because the church as the body of Christ continues His work upon the earth today.

In the third place, we are supposed to be a servant church because in our obedience to the gospel and becoming a part of the church, we took on the role of Christ's servant.

In **John 12**, beginning in verse 25, we hear Jesus saying to us:

Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26) If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

That we are supposed to be His servants is certainly implied in the words of **Luke 6:46**, where Jesus asks: "*Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and not what I tell you?*"

In his letter to the Christians in Colossae, Paul tells them, "*Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.*"

In a number of word pictures revealing to us the final judgment, again and again we hear the Lord saying, "Well done good and faithful **SERVANT**!"

Being a servant is a part of who and what we are. The church of the servant Lord, is the body of the Lord who serves, and is made up of those who understand and see themselves as His servants; as a part of that serving body. We are servants of the Lord, servants to one another, and servants who carry on His work in the world today.

In the spirit of **Titus 2:11-14**, *we are a people who have been saved by the grace of God, trained to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in the present age. We are a people who are waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify us so that we might be his unique people; a people who are zealous for every good work!*

Let me close with a question: How many deacons does this church have? We have had ten deacons, and in just a little while six more will be added to that number.

How many ministers do we have? Some people might think, "Well, we had two but now we are down to one." Well, if we are down to one minister in this church, we are worse off than we know!

Remember what I shared with you at the beginning of the lesson? The word *diakonos* is translated three times as deacon, but twenty times as minister. So how many ministers do we have?

How many deacons, how many ministers, and how many servants does this church have? Keep in mind, the same word—*diakonos*—is rendered by all three words—deacons, ministers, and

servants. So how many servants does this church have? Do you see why I said if we just have one minister, one servant we are in trouble? All of us are supposed to be servants, aren't we? If we have a hundred and fifty members, we are supposed to have a hundred and fifty servants.

I don't think we do, at least from what I can see and hear. We have some who have yet to figure that out. We have some who have yet to figure out what their ministry is, just what it is that they are supposed to be doing in and with and for the body and for the world around them. Some are still thinking that everyone else should be serving them, and they are the ones who get a little upset when they are not served in the way they think they should. We are all supposed to be servants, and I can hardly wait until we as a church come alive with every member excited and engaged in a ministry for which they were created and redeemed!

Nevertheless, even though the whole body of Christ is to be a body of servants, as we learned from the example found in the 6th chapter of Acts, there are some things that must not be overlooked or neglected. And that is why some servants, some ministers, some *diakonoi* must be appointed to be responsible for specific tasks. And that is why today, the elders are going to appoint six more men to help take care of those matters that are critical to us.

We are not offering the invitation this morning but if there is anyone wanting or needing to respond, please let us know as soon as possible. Your needs are very important to all of us so please do not hesitate to let us know.

At this time the elders are going to come and lead us through the remainder of the service.