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THE DEACON

By Harold Turner

Recently one of our readers requested an article on the deacons in the church; their qualifications, selection, and their work. We appreciate requests from our readers, and hope that our efforts to answer these will be of help to all.

The idea of what a deacon is, and of his work and responsibility to the church, may vary widely among people. And, while we may listen to and appreciate the ideas and opinions of others, these must never become the standard of determining spiritual matters. Only that which can be proven by the Bible is worthy of our consideration and action.

The word 'deacon' is found only five times in the KJV of the Bible. The word is translated from the Greek word 'diakonos'. In his Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, W. E. Vine defines diakonos as: "Diakonos primarily denotes a servant, whether as doing servile work, or as an attendant rendering free service, without particular reference to its character." Diakonos is translated twenty times as minister, and seven times as servant.

Where diakonos is translated as deacon, it obviously has reference to a special servant in the church rather than to just any person rendering service.

From 1 Tim. 3:8-13 we learn that deacons are selected and appointed to their work depending upon definite qualifications. These qualifications relate both to his character and his family. Deacons must be: Grave (serious minded), not doubletongued (saying a thing to one person and giving a different view of it to another), not given to much wine (a habitual wine drinker. However, today in our country, because of the influence, a total abstinence would be necessary), not greedy of filthy lucre (driven by the love of money), holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience (holding fast the principles of the gospel in a heart void of unclean thoughts), the husband of one wife (a married man, and obviously not entangled in the questionable involvements of divorce and remarriage), ruling the children and the house well (he must have children, and he must oversee their needs being the head of the house), he is to be appointed only after having been proven and found blameless (above reproach, capable and competent to minister to the work for which he is

selected). In addition to his qualifications, his wife must also be: grave, not slanderous, sober, faithful in all things.

The selection of those qualified would be according to Acts 6:3. Men who meet the approval of the congregation whom they will serve. The word deacon is not found in this text, however the work for which these were selected is 'diakonia', which is the work of the diakonos--deacons.

From Acts 6:1-4 we can learn one thing that can be of help in the selection and appointment of deacons. First we see a need to be taken care of; then men were selected and appointed to minister to that need. This is an important principle for the church today. Where there is a special work to be done a qualified person should be selected and appointed to that work. What would be the point of selecting men to be deacons unless there was some specific work to which they are assigned? There is no scriptural support for just selecting and appointing men to wear the title of deacon. The deacon is to be a servant; unless there is a service to be rendered the man is just a title holder.

There is another problem that needs consideration about the matter of deacons. Many have the idea that the government of the church consists of elders and deacons. Deacons are sometimes considered second in command to the elders, or as elder trainees. There are times when the number of deacons exceed the number of elders, and the deacons out vote the elders and override or defeat the decisions of the elders. This is one of the most ridiculous and unscriptural practices in the church. Where does the Bible teach that the deacon is an elder trainee? Where does the Bible teach that the deacon is second in command to the elder? Where does the Bible teach that the deacon has any rule in the church? The Bible doesn't even remotely imply this. It is a practice foreign to the Bible. Only the elders have the rule and oversight of the congregation (Acts 20:28, 1 Tim. 5:17, 1 Pet. 5:1-3). The deacons are not a part of the governmental organization of the church. They are special servants fulfilling a work assigned to them by the elders.

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Does Divorce Solve The Problem?

By James Knight

One of the greatest problems that we have in the world today is divorce. In the United States we are rapidly reaching the point where almost fifty per-cent of the marriages are ending in divorce. It was estimated that in 1974 there would be more than one million divorces take place, and I am sure that this number was exceeded in 1975. In the area where I live we have seen many marriages of long duration end in divorce in the past two or three years.

Why are so many marriages breaking up? I am sure that there are many reasons that could be given, but I would like to condense it down and just say that most marriages are dissolved because a problem arises that the parties seem to be unable to solve. Just here let me ask another question, DOES DIVORCE SOLVE THE PROBLEM? In answer I suggest the following:

We have spent much time in argument concerning the grounds for divorce and remarriage. We have laws and arguments to support our views. I wonder if we have tried to teach our people that divorce, even when justified, is not always the answer, nor does it always solve the problem. Of course there are tensions and problems in marriage, but have we considered the tensions and problems in divorce?

Any divorce, regardless of the fault or circumstances, is an admission of failure. Someone has failed; maybe both, but always one. Even the innocent victim is faced with the tragedy of failure. The divorcee is faced with the problem of facing society alone. An attempt is usually made to cover up or hide the sense of failure. Sometimes this is done by condemning the other party, by self justification, or by other means. The rending apart of "one" brings about severe damage emotionally, psychologically, as well as spiritually.

Divorce usually carries with it a measure of hate. The love of two has been turned into hate and this into divorce. Now the divorcee finds time to suffer the hurt and shame of this tarnished and broken love. The hate that has destroyed the home burns within. How difficult for the one to truly be Christian during this kind of trial! Pride

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The Fulton County Gospel News

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EDITORS: Erwin Cowen
and Harrold Turner.

Abhorring Evil

By Cliff Stewart

In Romans 12:9 Paul exhorts us to "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good." Abhor means to shrink from; regard with horror; detest; loathe. This suggests the attitude we should have toward sin. In Jude, verse 23, it is expressed, "Hating even the garments spotted by the flesh." Lot's attitude toward the sins of Sodom is described in 2 Peter 2:8, "For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds." Paul wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica admonishing them to "Abstain from all appearance of evil." (1 Thess. 5:22.)

The Christian's attitude toward sin is very important. I cannot hate sin in my own life unless I also hate sin in others. If I am unconcerned about the sins of those around me it is not likely that I shall be alarmed by my own sins. The church at Corinth was rebuked because of their toleration of the one in their midst who was guilty of fornication (1 Cor. 5:1-6). God condemned the church at Thyatira because they suffered (permitted or tolerated) that woman Jezebel in her iniquity (Rev. 2:20). After stating a long list of sins practiced by the Gentiles, Paul concludes with this statement, "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, BUT HAVE PLEASURE IN THEM THAT DO THEM." (Rom. 1:32).

Only when we have the proper attitude toward sin can we have the proper attitude toward righteousness.

When a Christian departs from love, he departs from God: For God is love."

Characteristics of Good Leadership

By Jason Frizzell

Think on this: Having a church building full of members is like having the woodbox full of wood -- it is a good place to have the wood, but it won't help keep us warm until the wood catches on fire. So it is with the members of the Lord's church; until we do the right things according to the will of God, we are as dead sticks in the wood box.

Bear in mind that children of all ages have one thing in common -- they close their ears to advise and open their eyes to example.

A society seldom rises above its leaders. The history of any declining nation shows a lack of dedicated leadership. Nehemiah was one of God's truly great leaders. Parents, teachers, elders, deacons, or anyone that is in a leadership capacity in the Lord's work would do well to note these great characteristics of Nehemiah's leadership. NEHEMIAH AGONIZED:

Seeing the great distress that had befallen God's people, Nehemiah uttered these words; "When I heard these words, I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven." (Neh. 1:4.) How many leaders in the Lord's church today, how many preachers, teachers, deacons, parents, etc. have actually shed tears over the conditions that are prevalent in the church today? Great leaders are people who really care about the church and what happens in the lives of each member. We sing a song that expresses such concern -- "For her my tears shall fall, for her my prayers ascend."

NEHEMIAH ANALYZED:

Nehemiah prayed day and night for his people. "I beseech thee, O Lord God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments: Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee." (Neh. 1:5-6.)

It is not enough to mourn over the conditions. The source of the problem must be found. Leaders often fail to take a hard look at problems because of the subsequent responsibility of doing something about it. We as members are often hesitant to go to the right source to correct a problem. This failure only lends support to the problems.

NEHEMIAH ORGANIZED:

Nehemiah viewed the problem, then spoke to the people; "Ye see the distress

that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work." (Neh. 2:17-18.)

Knowledge of a problem is half its cure. All the people of Israel were given something to do. True leadership allocates work for each to do. Happy is the congregation that can feel it is working WITH and not FOR or UNDER a leadership that says and does not. NEHEMIAH SUPERVISED:

Nehemiah was a promoter, a player coach. He also helped in the work that was being done. Many examples are given in the Bible where people of all walks of life attended to the business of leadership by having the attitude of "I cannot lead where I have not been." The very idea of leadership involves a 'going before'. A knowledge of how to accomplish a work by having had personal experience. Such involves a response to 2 Tim. 2:15, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed rightly dividing the word of truth." And thereby learning to "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." (1 Pet. 3:15.)

What immense understanding of people this takes! What dedication! Someone has written these words; "God will do most when men do their best."

THE DEACON (Cont.)

The work of a deacon is important. He may be appointed to look after some benevolent program, the upkeep of the church property, looking after the teaching needs in the Bible School program, or any of numerous other such tasks. Such men are to be appreciated for their willingness to devote their time and energies to the work of the church.

But, anytime we refuse to follow the guidelines of the Bible we are heading for trouble. And, when we follow the Bible in all things we will grow and glorify the name of our Saviour. May our concern always be first and foremost to be scripturally right, and then act accordingly.

God Now Speaks Through His Son

By Richard England

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son . . ." (Heb. 1:1-2).

In the garden of Eden, God walked and talked with Adam and Eve personally (Gen. 3:8). God spoke directly to Noah, and warned him about the flood that was to come (Gen. 6:15). God spoke to Abraham through messengers (Gen. 18). On one occasion, at least, God spoke to Abraham by an angel calling out of heaven (Gen. 22:11). God spoke to Jacob in a dream (Gen. 28:12-15). Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, received a message from God at the hand of Joseph (Gen. 41:16). It was out of the burning bush that God spoke to Moses (Exod. 3:1-6). The children of Israel heard the voice of God out of the fire, smoky, thunderous mountain (Exod. 19:16-25). Elijah heard God in a still small voice (1 Kgs. 19:12). On and on we could go showing that God did indeed speak to people in the past at many times and in various ways. But, what the writer of Hebrews tells us is that the same God NOW SPEAKS TO US THROUGH HIS SON.

In Deut. 18:15-20, a prophecy concerning Jesus, shows that Christ would come to speak what God instructed him. Jesus said, "I came not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." (Jn. 6:38.) From Jn. 5:22 we learn that God "hath committed all judgment unto the Son." And from Jn. 5:27 that God gave Christ "authority to execute judgment."

When Jesus left the earth, he did not leave the people without the necessary information about the great message he brought and the salvation he provided by his suffering and resurrection. He assured his ambassadors, the apostles, that he would send the Holy Spirit to teach them all things, and to remind them of all things he had previously taught them so that nothing would be left unsaid in the future generations. He also stated that the Holy Spirit would not speak of himself, but only that which he was told to speak (Jn. 16:13). Hence, to hear the Spirit was to hear Christ, and to hear Christ was to hear what the Father spoke.

When the inspired revelation came to the Apostles, they wrote it down, as they were instructed to do, so that we might know what they had received, and understand it (Eph. 3:3-4, Rev. 1:11). This message, the gospel, the faith, was "once delivered unto the saints." (Jude 3). This meant that when it had been completed, the miraculous revelations would cease. This was God's plan (1 Cor. 13:9-13).

Some Basic Facts About God - No. 2

By Leslie Leonard

For a correct understanding of how God thinks it is essential for us to study his revelation, the Bible. If we understand how God thinks we can make sure that our worship is acceptable and that we are not engaging in useless exercises. To gain this understanding we must examine the various incidents in the Scriptures which give us an insight into God's thinking.

In Genesis 4:1-12 (please turn and read this) we have the account of the first murder. Cain out of jealousy kills his brother, Abel, and for the first time Adam and Eve get a graphic illustration of what God meant by "die". As they look upon the body of their slain son they were shown what their sin had caused.

Of more importance to us though, is the lesson that this teaches about worship. We find Cain bringing "Of the first fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord", and "Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and the fat thereof." We are not told why they decided to make an offering. We can assume that it was a spontaneous act on

their part similar to the desire we feel when we want to worship God. But, we are told though, in Hebrews 11:4, "By faith, Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gift: and by it he being dead yet speaketh." So, it was because Abel offered "By faith" that it was accepted.

Now faith must mean something more than mere believing in God because both believed or they wouldn't have made the offering in the first place. In the Scriptures we find that faith is not only used to mean; to believe in, but it is also used to mean a system of belief. This is one of the definitions of faith. So the "By faith" used here, seems to mean that Abel offered a sacrifice according to a previous revealed "system of religious belief." In other words they had been told how they were to worship, and Abel is following the instructions while Cain isn't. It seems then that "the faith" required the offering of "the firstlings of the flock and the fat thereof", and not something else.

So "by faith" means that Abel offered what God had designated and it was accepted because that was what God wanted. From this we learn that it is God who determines how we are to worship and not man. Our sincerity, our desire to worship, and our opinions have nothing to do with whether the worship is acceptable to God. We can only be sure it is acceptable when it is done as God instructs.

From this we can also learn that God is not pleased with departures from his designated ways, and he does not look with favor upon those who are presumptuous enough to insist upon having their own way.

We might also notice that neither Abel nor Cain had any way of knowing that God had a reason for requiring animal sacrifices. They couldn't have known that God intended to educate mankind to look upon the shedding of blood as a means of removing sins. This was of course completed at least four thousand years later when Jesus shed his blood on the cross. In the same way we can't depend upon our reasoning to guide us. We must depend upon God's instructions. Reasoning would lead us to assume that the fruit of the ground would be as acceptable to God as the firstlings of the flock, and if the fruit of the ground was of more value than the animal, then it should be more acceptable, but this is not the way God reasons.

A basic fact is that we must accept God's guidance.

That message, the gospel, we must hear, receive, and abide by, if we are to be saved (1 Cor. 15:1-2). As Deut. 18:15-20 states, we cannot speak anything which he, the Prophet sent from God, did not speak. We are not to attribute something to Him which He has not said, nor are we to speak by any other authority. That prophet, Jesus Christ, has ALL authority (Matt. 28:18).

To receive the New Testament is to receive the teaching of the Apostles. To receive the teaching of the Apostles is to receive what the Holy Spirit spoke. To receive the teaching of the Holy Spirit is to receive what Christ spoke. And to receive what Jesus taught is to receive the will of the Father. This is the only way God speaks to man today.

The conclusion of this seems rather obvious. We must have a "thus saith the Lord" for all that we believe and practice religiously. We must provide the book, chapter, and verse for all things we do. Can you? Are you following ALL of the commands of Jesus? What about the name you wear religiously, is it a scriptural name? What do you believe and teach that Jesus requires in order to receive the remission of sins? Can you read it in the Bible? Can you find all the things you do in your worship authorized by Jesus, who has ALL authority? If you must answer no to any of these questions, you need to reconsider your convictions.

DOES DIVORCE SOLVE (Cont.)

has been wounded, conflicts and rebellion within self must be handled, new relationships in society must be made.

Though things have changed a great deal in recent years, society does not readily accept the divorce. Happy friendships with other couples are now more difficult. Old friends hesitate to take sides and thus find the easiest solution is to avoid both parties. Social engagements are now limited and even suspicion is now found in social engagements that were once accepted. The clean loneliness that death can leave is not found in divorce. This is loneliness of failure, of hate, and of shame.

From the foregoing things we can see that divorce does not solve the problem, but only complicates it. What then is the solution when problems arise in marriage; as surely they will?

When two people love each other enough to pledge themselves to each other in marriage, they must work to make this love grow each day. Only in this way can they hope to be able to solve problems that will arise. Also, they must spend a great deal of time in prayer about the problems as they come. Prayer will always cause us to view the problem from a very different perspective. We must also have a great respect for God's word and what it has to say about marriage and divorce.

The Bible teaches that marriage is until death (Rom. 7:3). God's word also teaches that fornication is the only thing, other than death, that can sever the marriage relationship (Matt. 19:9, Matt. 5:32). However, the Bible does not teach that the guilty party must be put away, but can be forgiven if they truly repent of the sin that they have committed. The only solution to the problem of divorce is abiding by the word of God.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Individuals:

Geneva Spencer \$5.00
 Carlie Crawford 2.00
 Herbert E. Rhoades 5.00

Churches of Christ:

Elizabeth 5.00
 Viola 5.00
 Agnos 5.00
 Sturkie 5.00
 Big Pond 10.00
 Jeff 10.00
 Whelling 75.00
 Williford 5.00

"It is right to love the sinner, no matter how vile; but it is never right to tolerate sin. Toleration of evil is a false kindness."

Denominational Baptism

By Gordon Ferguson

The erroneous teaching of various religious groups regarding baptism falls into three basic categories: (1) those who substitute sprinkling or pouring for immersion; (2) those who "baptize" infants; and, (3) those who practice immersion for wrong purposes.

The first of these errors can be answered fairly easily by the example of Philip and the eunuch in Acts 8:26-39. This, combined with the phrase "buried by baptism" in Col. 2:12 and Rom. 6:4, are conclusive, to say nothing of the lexical meaning of the Greek word for baptism.

The second error mentioned above is eliminated by a proper understanding of salvation by faith. Faith is everywhere shown to be a prerequisite of baptism (see Mark 16:16; Acts 8:12, 18:8). All examples of baptism in the New Testament follow belief, and therefore no babies are ever baptized. Infants do not need to be saved, for they are born in a safe condition rather than as sinners (see Ezek. 18:20; Matt. 18:3).

The third error is the one with which we want to spend the most time, for many (including some brethren) are confused on this point.

Christianity is a religion of motive and purpose. Outward acts, without proper understanding in the heart of the person involved, have never been acceptable to God. Under the old law, even the sacrifices were to be offered with a clear grasp of the purposes behind them. The statutes in the Pentateuch spell out these purposes in no uncertain terms. Likewise, the New Testament defines the purposes of baptism very plainly. Baptism is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38,22:16), the point at which one is born again (John 3:3-5), the means of entering Christ where salvation is (Gal. 3:27; 2 Tim. 2:10), and the act which places us into the one body which He promised to save (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:4; 5:23).

Now, the real question is this: "Can one be taught incorrectly and baptized correctly?" Our answer is no!

Certainly a person could sing, pray, give, and partake of the Lord's Supper in a wrong manner. This being so (and surely no one would disagree on these matters), one can also be baptized in a wrong manner, even if the person is sincere. For the sake of illustration, let us consider a hypothetical case involving the Lord's Supper. Someone could be taught to partake every Sunday, but be mistaught concerning the purpose. He could be told that in partaking, he is to remember Christ as the agent in creation (and He was - John 1:1-3), rather than as our sacrifice. The person involved would be observing the Supper regularly for a

sincere religious motive, but for the wrong purpose. Would God accept this worship? Would not the precepts of men make this worship vain? (Matt. 15:9) Surely they would.

Likewise, sincere and even "religious" purposes in the act of baptism can be unacceptable to God. Most denominations teach that baptism is "an outward sign of an inward grace." Those thus baptized believe that they are baptized after they are saved, and not in order to be saved. This is totally unscriptural. Consider Col. 2:12: "Having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God . . ." We are raised to walk in a new life (Rom. 6:4 also) through faith in the working of God in the act of baptism in itself. How can our "faith in the working of God" be transferred to another act (belief alone), and another time (before baptism), and still be acceptable?

Some are opposed to "re-baptism," but Paul was not (Acts 19:1-5). These that Paul baptized had previously been immersed according to John the Baptist's teaching, but needed to be immersed according to Christ's teaching of the Great Commission baptism. Bear in mind that Jesus Himself administered the baptism of John at one time (through his disciples - John 4:1-2). However, after the cross only one baptism was acceptable (Eph. 4:5), and that was the baptism of the new covenant. Any variation of this was not acceptable to Paul, and it should not be to God's teachers today. No one can be taught wrong and baptized right. The safe route to take should be obvious, and certainly God would not be displeased with those who really desire to conform to accurate teaching. I have never found an honest and sincere person who was satisfied for long with a questionable baptism once taught correctly.

Marmoth Springs, Arkansas
 Route 3
 Clovis Haysdale