

# The Ordination of Ministers of Mercy

A sermon delivered Sunday Morning, January 6, 2013  
at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.  
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Acts 6:3-4

***“Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; <sup>4</sup> but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”***

In August, I preached to you about the ministry of deacons. I told you then, and I repeat today, their business is mercy and their labor is kindness. Theirs is a ministry of mercy.

As I said that day, the reason deacons came into existence was because the apostles were overworked. They tried to juggle both the work of prayer and proclamation with the ministry to the poor and needy and, as a result, a certain number of widows were neglected in the daily distribution of food. It was causing some disruption and disunity in the church because these widows were being overlooked, not purposefully but because the workload was so much they were unable to keep up with it. It can be imagined that by this time the church is multiple thousands, therefore it is no surprise they were unable to keep up with the demand.

The apostle’s solution was to create a team of ministers whom they could delegate this work of feeding the poor to, and with the implementation of this plan the deacon ministry of the church was birthed. Again, to repeat myself from August the fifth, “The office of deacon was created to help the pastor help the church.” The apostle Paul said in Ephesians 4:11 that pastors are God’s gift to the church. Now, you go talk to Him about your gift if you’re not happy with him, but that’s who God gave you. The book of Acts, specifically here, seems to say that deacons are the church’s gift to the pastor. They are given to assist the shepherd so he can spend more time doing what he’s called to do—oversee the total ministry of the church and to give himself to prayer and proclamation.

Oak Grove, you have tremendously blessed me with these four amazing brothers of mercy, and I say that with all of my heart. These four brothers, Kent, Stan, Greg and Bobby, are dear men who have been given the necessary gifts and have already been doing the work of deacons. Since August, they have put their hands dutifully to the plow and have lifted this burden from me already. In fact, I’ve got to get used to it. Somebody came to me not too long ago informing me of a need with some people they knew and I immediately decided what we were going to do. About 24 hours later it dawned on me that I’ve got deacons to do that for me now. What a tremendous blessing, what an incredible gift these men are from you to me and I thank you so much. And

today we ordain and commission them to this ministry of mercy.

As I look at this text though, there is something we need to expound upon before we commission them, something that is for them and for this church—all of us.

Before we examine the text more in depth, I want to direct your attention to a very important principle and it is this:

### **I. EVERY CHRISTIAN IS TO SHOW MERCY**

Every Christian, not just these four brothers. Certainly there will be some who will hear terms like “ministers of mercy” and will walk away and say, “*I’m not so merciful and kind as perhaps these four men and I don’t have the gift of mercy, so it’s not important for me to be merciful.*” Well, before any storm brews, let me quell it right now and say that every Christian is commanded to show mercy. Not just these brothers. The Bible says in Matthew 5:7,

*“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy,”*

How many of you need mercy, especially from God? Then be merciful. That’s the command and it is for everyone for we all need mercy.

In Luke 6:36, Jesus made it a command,

*“Therefore, be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”*

If you are a child of God, in other words you are a descendent of God Almighty, because He is merciful you are called to carry on the family trait and be merciful.

One of the problems Jesus had with the Pharisees and the Scribes, the religious leaders of His day, is that they were not merciful and He chides, dare I say rebukes them in Matthew 23:23,

*“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.”*

So all of us are to be agents of mercy, but God has ordained some to have a special function of mercy in the body. So let me direct your attention now to this statement:

### **II. DEACONS ARE THE CHURCH’S AGENTS OF MERCY**

Today you are saying to these four men, “You represent us. You do the work of this church, me, you, all of us, as our agents of mercy.” Look at verse one of Acts six.

*“Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution of food.”*

Here was the situation; this is the context the early church found itself in. There was a dispute because of how mercy was being dispensed. I want you to see from this the solution that God worked. It says first of all that,

## **A. God Cares About His Church**

He created and ordained the office of deacon because, namely, God cares about us. He cares about the church, the corporate body; not the building. Oh please, I wish we could get that out of our heads, this notion that the building is the church. No, you're the church. We're the church. And God has given us these four men and this new ministry because He richly, greatly cares about you.

You may never come under dire financial need but you may be sick one day lying in a hospital bed, you'll need agents of mercy. You may go through a difficult time and you're hurting and may have nothing to do with dollars and cents, but your heart is nonetheless broken, you will need agents of mercy, men that God has appointed and called and gifted to come along side and minister to you. Sometimes mercy comes in the form of loving correction. Don't think that mercy simply means give, give, give. It means also giving what's necessary and needed.

God cares enough about His church to provide brothers who specialize in meeting the needs of its members. We wrongly assume that God cares little about the needs of this life or about your financial status. Jesus went to great lengths to teach us about money and stewardship and finances and your personal, temporal needs. He even included in His Lord's Prayer *give us this day our daily bread*. God cares about you in the most mundane and earthly things. So God, because He cares about that has given us a ministry devoted to insure that all of God's people within the confines of a local church do not go without basic necessities. Now in America, when people seem to live so prosperous, it might not seem to be so big of an issue. And then of course if you can't make it on your own, there is the safety net of the Federal Government. I'm not here to criticize, I'm thankful we have a society that wants to care for the poor and needy and the people who have come—from time to time—to helpless situations not of their own choosing. But let me say this clearly and plainly so that nobody misunderstands: we should not shove off to the Federal Government the responsibilities of caring for our own people right here. That's our responsibility. God cares enough to make sure we provide for them.

You could say these men are our church's social workers. They are to collect the funds to distribute to the poor and the needy. Whether they be jobless, sick, widowed, elderly, homeless, shut in, whatever that that physical, temporal need is, these are our workers that God has given to oversee it. That doesn't mean they do it all themselves. But they are now the ministers who have oversight of branch of ministry and so they will visit people in the homes to relieve suffering.

They will share the Word of God to encourage and strengthen the hearts of the hurting. God cares about us enough to give us this.

## **B. God Cares About Pastors and Elders**

Look at verse two. I get from this text that He cares about me, as a pastor.

*“So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.””*

The deacons were to relieve the apostles of the ministry of caring for the poor and the widows and in this way they helped to protect the spiritual leaders’ time for prayer and ministry. God loves me too, and He’s given these men to help me and, as I’ve already said, they’ve already begun to do it. What a blessing. I’m encouraged as they meet monthly and have already begun this awesome ministry of ministering to you and me. God cares about us all.

## **III. THIS IS A DIVINE CALLING**

A deacon must be called by God. Look at verse three,

*“Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.”*

These are the qualifications: the brothers must be full of the spirit and wisdom.

That’s an interesting term, *full of the Spirit*. Aren’t all Christians supposed to be full of the Spirit? Paul, in First Corinthians five says, as a command,

*“Be ye filled with the Holy Spirit.”*

So why would that be a qualification of a deacon if every Christian is to be full of the Holy Spirit?

It tells me two things. One, not every body in the church is Spirit-filled. And secondly, these men had a greater measure of the Spirit’s activity in their lives. What it simply means is that God had put His hand upon them even before they were appointed to this ministry. It was obvious to the early church that these seven men had already been set apart, because a deacon must be called by God.

## **A. A Deacon Must Be Called By God**

A deacon cannot be called by people because they are popular. In fact, I want to say this, a deacon must not be elected to serve either. That’s why we’ve done it the way we’ve done it. You have a voice. You prayed, you sought the Lord, but you didn’t elect these four men. You simply confirmed that God had already chosen them. That may be, in somebody’s mind just semantic to say, but it’s

a big deal because words mean something. It's not just a way to say it; it's how we believe in our heart. If you knew the process before these four men said yes, I tell you truthfully it's the process of years in my own heart to get it to this point here. But secondly, for the last several years I've prayed about the beginning of this ministry. Many men would come to my mind and God would say, "no, not this one." That doesn't mean the brother wasn't good or something was wrong or he was defective, it just wasn't God's choice. And then, when these men were approached and I asked them to consider this I told every one of them, "If you have no sense of God's leadership you better tell me no, I beg you to tell me no." We want God's people in God's place, because a deacon must be called by God.

Please listen carefully; this is a special calling but not a special class of Christians. These four men are no more special than anyone else in this place. This office of deaconship is not anything that makes them inherently special or different than the remainder of us. If anything, this calling is a calling to serve. These four men have been chosen by God to serve. Look at verse three,

*"Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them,"*

What is the responsibility the apostles desired to delegate to the deacons? Verse two tells us, to wait on tables. We could literally call these men waiters and it not be unbiblical because the word *deacon* means *waiter*. We've got four waiters here today. Does that mean you have to tip them? All the wives up here just said yes.

This is a calling to serve. This is a real gird-the-towel-around-your-waist-and-wash-your-brothers'-feet kind of ministry. It's not easy; there will be difficult situations these four men will have to deal with. They will not come as lords or as authority figures in and of themselves, but rather they come as humble servants to serve us, to minister to us in real, tangible, practical ways. It's a ministry of service. All four of these brothers have not taken this lightly. Before they were presented to you for your confirmation, they went through weeks of training and we detailed, outlined and discussed, what the biblical ministry of a deacon is and they have assumed this calling. Knowing full well what God expects and believing it is God's will for them to embrace this calling, they enter in to this service.

Deacons are not the governing body of the body. They are not the official board that dictates the decisions of the church; they are here to serve, to wait on us as a waiter waits on someone at a table.

Lastly, I want you to understand what is going on this morning because I don't want there to be any misunderstandings. The label of "ceremony" has the potential of misleading us. We're going to have a "ceremony," but I hate that terminology because it's not really a ceremony. So, let's confront that right now. We are not here to fulfill some ritual because this is the way it's supposed to be done. In fact, we will not do it the way most Baptist churches do it because we want to avoid ritualism. We are going to ordain, we are going to commission, but I want you to understand and

call your attention to the fact that:

#### **IV. THERE ARE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF ORDINATION**

##### **A. Weaknesses**

Charles Spurgeon said this of ordination,

*“Empty hands, it seems to me, are fitly laid on empty heads, and to submit to an empty ceremony is an idol waste of time.”*

The young Spurgeon went to the New Park Street pulpit in London, England when he was 20 years old. He had never been ordained and, of course, the deacons of the church wanted to ordain him shortly after they saw it was obvious God’s hand was on him and he was to become the pastor of that church. But Spurgeon resisted. That’s one of the things he said, “Empty hands upon empty heads.” He didn’t want any part of it and he gave three reasons why. I want to read two of those reasons to you because I see them as weaknesses of an ordination ceremony, for lack of a better word.

He wrote a letter to the leading deacon to state the reasons for not wanting to be ordained, I’m going to only state two, and here is the first one. He said,

*“Because I am a minister and will never receive authority and commission from man; nor do I like that which has the shadow of such a thing about it. I detest the dogma of apostolic succession, and dislike the revival of doctrine by delegating power from minister to minister.”*

In essence, his first object is that, as a pastor and preacher of the Gospel, he receives no commission or authority from men. He’s not called by men to that position, he’s called by God, so why have men lay hands upon you and “commission” or “ordain” you to the ministry that God has already ordained? It’s His calling. That is important.

Secondly, he said,

*“If no authority be inferred, what’s the meaning of the ceremony?”*

In other words, he said no power or grace comes on people as we lay hands and pray on them. No power, no special grace is going to be afforded to them, so why do this?

He concluded the letter by stating that he would suffer himself to be ordained by the church if they insisted upon it. Here is what he said.

*“I trust, my dear sir, that you will not imagine that I write warmly, for I am willing to submit, but it will be submission. I shall endure it as self-mortification in order that you may all be pleased. I*

*would rather please you than myself, but still, I would have it understood by all the church that I endure it as a penance for their sake.”*

The deacons decided that he didn't have to be ordained.

Well, Spurgeon is right. The ordination service, with its laying on of hands, does not confer power or authority upon the subject. So, you four men, there is nothing of authority or power being transferred from me to you. I'm not Moses and you're not the 70 elders. In the Old Testament the Spirit of God, which was upon Moses, was placed upon all 70 elders and they began to prophesy, but that will not happen here today. If it does, it will be the exception, not the rule. It cannot do this. It cannot confer any special grace to you, no more than the bread or the cup of the Lord's Table confers grace to the communicant, the person receiving. No it cannot or will not do anything to our brothers today, only God can do that. But Spurgeon was wrong, and I say that with great fear. You know my heart and affection for that dear man, but he was not entirely right.

There is value in what we do here today and this leads me to the strength and the reason why we are doing what we're about to do today.

## **B. Strengths**

### ***1. It is a public recognition of the call of God on these men's lives.***

It is a public recognition. We acknowledge that God has separated you four men to this ministry. We see it, it is evident to us and that is a good thing. Therefore it is right and proper that we take these moments to thank God for these four men. That is well intended and hence it is not wrong for us to do what we are about to do. As we lay hands and we pray, we pray a prayer of thankfulness, thanksgiving, and gratitude to God for giving us these four men. It is right that we acknowledge His call in their lives with thankfulness.

### ***2. It is a public acknowledgement that only God can confer authority on these brothers.***

And therefore we show our brothers the respect the authority of God carries. What I mean is this: this is an office of the church. There are only two offices, elder or *pastors* as you know the term, and deacons. They are not the same. Elders have the oversight of the church; they are the Spiritual leaders of the church. Deacons are the ministers of mercy, they minister to the temporal needs and come alongside the elders or, in this case, elder, singular, pastor, and help me to make sure that is happening in this church. And because it is an office ordained and set aside in scripture, we respect that office and therefore we acknowledge it today, that God will anoint these brothers and confer His authority upon them to fulfill this responsibility.

### ***3. It is an excellent opportunity for the church to pray for those submitting to the call of God.***

What an awesome time for us to come and pray for these brothers, not just today but I hope you pray for these brothers weekly. Our hands are empty, but we pray to Him whose hands are full of power and grace. As we lay hands on these brothers, we acknowledge that it's not our hands that have any power but the hand of Jesus, and may His hands rest upon them with much power and much grace so that this ministry is not just something that is title only, but a viable part of how God works in this body to its health and growth.

This is a momentous day for our church. For years we have not had a true biblical deacon ministry, now at this time Christ has assembled a team of brothers whom will assume His ministry of mercy among us. Surely Christ is building His church here. Why have we not had this before, someone might ask? Well, it's a long story and this is not the proper time or setting to explain. God has been building this church for years, but He's also been working in us individually, including me. When I first came, I will give you this glimpse, and this glimpse only, the church was in somewhat disarray. There were some issues and it required a young, brash, arrogant, 33 year old, who thought that God and he was a majority, to take the bull by the horns and to do what he felt God was leading him to do.

I look back at that 33 year old man and think, "Goodness, why did he do that?" And I'm scared to death to repeat some of those things I did then, but that's what God needed and wanted. He didn't call me as a 52 year old, he called me as a 33 year old, and that's my style of leadership. As I've explained so many times, it's just easier for me to say *do this, you do that*, and try to administer it all. But God began to show me in the year 2000 that is not the way a New Testament church operates. I'm not Moses coming down from the mountain with a word from God telling you all, "Thus says the Lord." God's body works much differently under the New Covenant than that. Yes, I have oversight, yes I am to lead as God leads, but friends, every one of you who are saved and regenerate are connected to the Head, Jesus Christ, and the same Spirit that is in me is in you. And after seeing that and wanting to develop a very true ministry of deacons, God had to prepare four men for it.

Had we initiated this when I really wanted to as I discussed with Brother Greg years ago, Brother Bobby or Brother Kent wouldn't be here. God has this for a special moment. Some of the choices we probably would have made then would have been faulty, but you never lose when you wait on God. Sometimes it seems things aren't happening, but God is never idle even though He seems silent.

This is a momentous day. This is evidence that Christ has been and is building His church.

One final word—these men cannot do this ministry alone. As our church reaches out to this city and this area and as we add as many as the Lord our God shall call, these four men will not be able to do what is required, they will need your help. But we must not wait until we grow in size before we help them; they need your help today.



Many of you will be asked to come alongside of them, to carry out the vision God gives them to care for the poor, the needy and the hurting. Some of you will be called upon to be encouragers of the sick and the afflicted. Some of you will be called upon as ushers to serve the body when it's gathered here in unique ways other than just taking up an offering. Some of you will be called upon to be the bearers of goodwill and hope to those who are hopeless, and of course, all of us are going to be asked to give financially as God has prospered us. But you will not just labor under these brothers' authority as they labor under mine, but you will also work beside them as co-laborers as they now come alongside me. Help them help this body, the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. Don't give deaf ears to their pleas for assistance. Do not shut up the fullness of your heart when they ask you to aide those who are empty in soul.

Bear these four brothers up in your private prayer closet and then be willing to lend them your hands in the public places where mercy is needed. Help them. Come alongside them so that this ministry of mercy will work here. Some of you will receive their care and help. You'll be the recipients of their ministry and as you do, I'm asking this of all of us, receive their mercy with the express desire within your own heart to be healed, whatever the affliction might be, financial or physical, so that you may reach out and touch someone else. Don't be content to be the recipient of the Lord's grace through this ministry of mercy, but set your eye on serving others, for as the Lord has said, "It's more blessed to give than the receive." And let us all be grateful to the Lord for His riches freely given us, which enables us to be merciful to others.

And all the people of the Lord said, amen.