

A Ministry of Mercy

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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; 4 but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

What were these seven men appointed by the Apostles to do? There is only one answer to that question. Their business was mercy. The Apostles were overworked but never able to do their duties because they were busy doing the work of ministering to the poor and the needy and could not do what they were called to do which was to pray and preach. As Bilbo Baggins says in answer to Gandalf’s request to know how his old friend was doing, “I feel thin. Sort of stretched, like butter scraped over too much bread.” The Apostles were spread thin and, as a result, a certain number of widows were neglected in the daily distribution of food and this was causing a disruption in the church. So the Apostles devised a solution. Create a team of ministers—we know them as deacons—whom they could delegate this work of feeding the poor, and with the implementation of this plan the deacon ministry of the church was birthed.

The office of deacon was created to help the pastor help the church. In Ephesians 4:11 it says pastors are gifts to the church.

Luke, in Acts 6, says 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 is called to do: oversee the total ministry of the church and give himself to prayer and proclamation.

Today Oak Grove gets the opportunity to bless me incredibly with four men who are amazing brothers of mercy. I mean that sincerely. These four brothers, Kent, Stan, Greg and Bobby are dear men who have been given the gifts necessary and have already been doing the work of deacons without the title or recognition. What an incredible gift these men are to this church. And now I ask you to give them to me so that we may appoint them to the ministry of mercy.

I want to do three things in this message, first I want to explain the ministry of the deacons, second give the qualifications of the deacon, and lastly share how these brothers will serve us and the Lord as they form the ministry of mercy for our church.

I. The Ministry of the Deacon

I want to begin this part of the message by busting some myths.

A. Busting the Myth of Deacons

1. The myth of deacons governing the church.

This myth says deacons are called to have oversight over the ministry of the local church and are to direct its affairs and act like an official board. In fact, often deacons are called the official board of the church. That, my friends, is a gross myth that has crippled many local churches as a result.

In 1 Timothy 3:1 the Apostle Paul says,

“This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.”

The title *bishop* is just another biblical synonym for the word *pastor*. Another biblical synonym for pastor is *elder*. These three words are interchangeable and used throughout the New Testament to speak of the office of pastor. So when Paul says, “He who desires the position of a bishop,” he is speaking of the overseer because the word *bishop* literally means *overseer*. It’s the office and the responsibility of the pastor to have oversight over the church.

Let me be quick to say that it’s not my responsibility to govern the church. Pastors are not to govern the church. That, too, is a bad myth floating around today. I am so grateful for the respect this church has afforded me almost 19 years now, serving here as pastor. I take that very seriously. But even I am not to govern this church. There is only one head and His name is Jesus.

You say *Jesus isn’t here among us and that’s not practical. We need practical leadership*. What do you mean Jesus isn’t practical? Just because He’s invisible doesn’t mean He’s not practical, nor does it mean He cannot exert His will on a group of believers if their hearts are inclined to Him. This is not a sermon on pastors but I want you to understand that no man governs the church except one, Christ Jesus.

Returning to the text, many modern translations instead of using the word *bishop* use the word *overseer*. Thus, pastors are overseers and not deacons.

Another text of Scripture that will bust the myth that deacons are the official governing body of the church is found in Acts 15:6, 22.

At this time, in Acts 15, there was a crisis in Christianity so grave it could have killed Christianity in its tracks. A council was called and formed in Jerusalem to determine the outcome of this controversy that was so serious it could have stopped the church then and there. I want you to notice the leadership positions that were called and what leadership positions were not called. You will notice they do not include deacons.

“And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter” (Acts 15:6).

Verse 22,

“Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; [namely], Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren.”

There is no mention of deacons. Therefore, the absence of deacons in leadership roles in a very crucial time suggests that deacons were not part of leadership as far as the oversight of the local church and, in this case, all the churches at that time.

2. The myth of deacons as a checks and balance to the pastor.

This myth says that the deacons' main task is to be a watchdog over the pastor. It is their responsibility to ensure he doesn't step out of line. This is what so many of our churches believe is the sole responsibility of the deacon. When the pastor oversteps his boundaries they are there to nip at his heels, barking and baring their teeth, letting him know he must get back in line. This is completely false and unsustainable.

Look at how that kind of government works in our nation. We have a checks and balances type government. We have the Executive Branch—which is the presidential branch, we have the Legislative branch—which is Congress made up of the Senate and House of Representatives, and we have the Judicial Branch, the Supreme Court. Each of the three branches has equal powers and is supposed to keep the others honest. Well, you see how well that works! To bring such a manmade method and ideology into the local church is nothing more than a recipe for disaster. It destroys the unity of the church. It puts pastor against deacons and deacons against pastor and gridlock sets up. We want no such system here.

The ministry and oversight of the church does not belong to deacons, it belongs to pastors and to think the deacons are to make up the official governing board is simply and blatantly unbiblical.

3. The myth of deacons as property caretakers.

In some churches that's all deacons do, they take care of the property. I want to suggest to you that the Bible doesn't say that. The qualifications of these men are too high and more character-oriented than to be just physical caretakers of the property. In fact, most of their qualifications are identical to mine. You don't need those kinds of qualifications to take care of the shrubbery and to clean the closets. In fact, look at this. I Timothy 3:4-5, this is one of my qualifications as a pastor.

“[Elder] one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)”

And so when a church looks for a pastor they shouldn't look for a man who is a great businessman because that's not one of the qualifications; they ought to find one who knows how to run his household because the church is not a business, it's a family. You need a family man in the pulpit; you don't need a businessman.

Notice verse 12 of the same chapter. This is one of the qualifications of a deacon.

“Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling [their] children and their own houses well.”

It's the exact qualification of an elder. Why would God require them to manage their own household well—the same qualification of an elder—if all they're supposed to do is sweep the floors, patch the roof and paint the walls? Deacons aren't to be the property caretakers, we've got three good men who serve as trustees to do that. It's not the ministry of a deacon.

And, by the way, the first deacons couldn't be property caretakers because in the early church the church had no property. It would be hard to care of the property if the church didn't own property. The early churches met in homes. Consider this myth busted.

B. The Work of a Deacon

The word *deacon* tells you something of his ministry. The word is translated in the New Testament not just deacon—*diakonos*, the Greek word—but it's also translated in your English Bibles as servant; relief; minister or ministry. When you see those words in the following three verses it is the word *diakonos*.

“Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables’” (Acts 6:2).

The apostles were saying that as elders they shouldn't deacon tables, they were to pray and proclaim the Word. This is word serve is the same exact word for deacon.

“Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea” (Acts 11:29).

They are determined to send deacon to the brethren. Judea was devastated by a terrible famine. As a result a financial crisis loomed over the Judean churches. Help was needed. The predominate Gentile churches sent relief and they did not send deacons, they sent money. From this we gain some idea of what a deacon's responsibilities are. Serve tables and give relief for brethren.

In 2 Corinthians 8:4, Paul talks about taking up collections and sending the relief money to the needy brethren,

“Imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.”

Ministering is same word as deacon.

So what is a deacon?

1. The deacon is a minister of mercy.

I use the word *minister* purposely. A minister may not be a pastoral minister, having oversight of the church at large and doing the preaching and teaching. In fact, a deacon does not need to meet the qualification of teaching as does a pastor. However, he still holds an office in the church and that office is a ministry, therefore you can call the deacons ministers, just like you would call the pastor. These men form a team of ministers whose ministry is not like mine, but nonetheless important.

As you see in our text the first deacons were instituted to minister to the relief of widows in the early church. They were appointed by the Apostles to minister or serve. Their ministry was to feed the poor.

2. The deacon is a minister of help to the overseer.

We've already explained this. The deacons were to relieve the Apostles in the ministry of caring for the poor and widows and in this way they helped protect the spiritual leader's time for prayer and ministry. So having said that let me capsule what these four men's ministries will be as we institute a ministry of deacons.

Deacons here at Oak Grove will be the primary caregivers. I use the word *primary* because they aren't the only ones giving care. All of us should be giving care, but these are the ones who have been called by God and given the office of deacon to be the primary caregivers to make sure the physical needs of our people are being met by the congregation.

They are under the oversight of the pastor or pastors, but it's their responsibility to minister to you and to your needs. You could call them the church's social workers. They are to collect funds to distribute to the poor and the needy. Whether it is a jobless situation, or sickness that has brought financial distress or created other needs in the home. They are to help us help our widows. We have not done well by our widows though we have few. We should have done this superbly since we have so few. We want to minister to these women better than we've done in the past and these four will help the church to do that.

We're not saying, "Okay, Kent, Greg, Stan, Bobby, now you guys go do all of this as we sit at home comfortably, watching television." No. They are going to help us minister to them. It is their responsibility to oversee this ministry and make sure it gets done.

I want the church to keep as many of our elderly from having to go to assisted living and nursing homes as possible. In other words, if there are no family members to care for our elderly, then it's the church's responsibility to do everything we can to keep them in their home as long as they can take care of themselves.

The deacons are to visit people in their homes, relieve suffering and share the Word of God to encourage and strengthen the heart of those hurting and going through difficulty.

II. The Qualifications of the Deacons.

Why are these four men presented to you today? Because they're qualified. Here are the qualifications:

Three are found in our text Acts 6:2.

1. Full of the Holy Spirit

2. Full of Wisdom

“Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.”

Everyone in the New Testament was supposed to be full of the Spirit but the apostles made this distinction because apparently not everyone was so filled. These seven men were spirit led. Perfectly? No, but consistently. These seven men were also to be full of the wisdom of God. They've been tested, they're not new or young men who did not have some form of life experience. They needed to display that they had wisdom from God.

There was a third qualification in Acts 6, “of good reputation.” But since it is also found in the list of qualifications found in 1 Timothy 3, I will deal with it in that context. It is they are to be:

3. Respectable.

“Likewise deacons must be reverent . . .” (1 Timothy 3:8a)

This is the same as being men of outstanding reputation. The word reverent simply means honorable; respectable. These four men we present to you today are men of honor. Again, are they perfect? No. But then I'm not either, and guess what? Neither are you. None of us are perfect. We're talking about men who are honorable, men of integrity.

4. Honesty

“Likewise deacons must . . . not double-tongued . . .” (1 Timothy 3:8b)

As the old Indian said, “he must not speak with forked tongue.” To be double-tongued means to say one thing to one man and something else completely different to another man. Deacons are not to be hypocritical. What you see is what you get. I can whole-heartily say that of these four men. There are no pretense or airs with any of these four brothers. They are genuine, real men.

5. Temperate with Alcohol

“Likewise deacons must . . . not given to much wine . . .” (1 Timothy 3:8c)

We don’t need any drunken deacons. In fact, we don’t need any drunken Christians. Not at all!

6. Financial Integrity

“Likewise deacons must . . . not greedy for money.” (1 Timothy 3:8d)

It doesn’t mean just that they’re not greedy for money, it means more than that. It means they are reputable with their own finances and aren’t reckless with their own money. Why is that an important qualification? Because they are to distribute money to the needy. They need to be wise with how they handle God’s money, which also includes their own. They don’t need to be men who run into debt, they need to be men of financial integrity.

7. Doctrinal Integrity

“Holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.” (1 Timothy 3:9)

This simply means they know what the faith is. You can’t hold the mystery of the faith if you don’t know what the faith is. It’s simply the basic essential doctrines of the Christian faith. The Bible doesn’t require they teach the faith, that’s my responsibility and those who are gifted to teach, but they are to know it so they can give an answer to the hope that lies within them to anyone who would ask. And so they can share the Gospel with others, and they should be not only sharing the Gospel, but also living it out as well. Their conscious bears them witness that they are living out what they believe.

8. Tested and Blameless

“But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless.” (1 Timothy 3:10)

Again, blameless doesn’t mean perfect, but it means above reproach. Meaning that nothing can be brought against these four men today that would be of such a nature that would disqualify them.

These men are to be examined and tested. Novices are not needed.

9. Family Integrity

“Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.” (1 Timothy 3:12)

This doesn't mean their children have to be saved, but as long as their children are in the home they are to be submissive to leadership. The wife is to be supportive. It is very important that the four wives of these men are supportive of them and in submission to their leadership and ministry because the Bible gives qualifications for deacon's wives as well. I believe these four women are practicing biblical submission to their husbands.

10. Marital Integrity

“Let deacons be the husbands of one wife . . .” (1 Timothy 3:12)

I saved this for last because I want to spend some time on it. Take off your rose colored glasses, your glasses of bias of what you've been told, and let's listen to the Scriptures. Then, after you hear what the Scriptures say and you don't like what they say, you can put your bias glasses back on. But you will not be able to do so without having heard what I think the Bible says. I can stand today and say with all honesty I believe I have the mind of the Lord on this issue.

There are some who believe this means a divorced man could not serve as a deacon because “he has more than one wife,” a former wife and a present wife. Well, I want to be respectful to the men who hold that position. Some honorable, outstanding men of God hold to that position, so I do not disrespect them or the position they hold. But as for me, I have to be accountable to God as I understand the Scriptures, so let me tell you why I believe that is not true.

I believe a divorced man can serve as a deacon. I believe he can even serve as an elder. Why do I say that? First, let me be very clear. I want to refer you to two sermons I preached last year. The first one is **Jesus and Divorce** from Matthew 5:31-32 and the other one is **Jesus and Remarriage** from Matthew 5:32. In those sermons I give a very thorough explanation on this position, so I'm not going to repeat all that information. This week the first of those two messages, **Jesus and Divorce** was transcribed and it has been edited. It is available on the web.

Let me state what I said in that sermon that my position about divorce is ultra-conservative. In other words, the same brother that would say a divorced man could not serve as a deacon would grant that divorce could take place if it was over the sake of adultery. He would say that at least his divorce did not violate God's commandment because his spouse was unfaithful to him. My position is—that's liberal to me. I don't think that's what the Bible says. I think the Bible says—no divorce. Divorce is a sin, period. There is no exemption for adultery. Even if your mate commits adultery, that does not give you a reason nor excuse to go out, contact an attorney, and file divorce papers. If you do, Jesus is saying your heart is hard. The adultery doesn't justify the divorce. It doesn't mean the act of adultery is not sinful, nor does it mean haven't been hurt

greatly, but Jesus made it absolutely clear when the Pharisees asked him about Moses permitting a bill of divorce, He said yes, because of the hardness of your heart.

God intended from the beginning that divorce should not occur.

“Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.” (Matthew 19:4-6)

Adultery does not put asunder that marriage, contrary to popular theological belief. God’s method is always reconciliation. Now, if the erring partner does not want to be reconciled then, yes, divorce is permitted. Why is it permitted? Because of the hardness of someone’s heart who is not willing to either reconcile or be reconciled.

That is an ultra-conservative position of divorce. Very few people I know hold that position. Divorce ought not to take place at all and is forbidden completely, that’s my position.

However, when it comes to remarriage I’m considered ultra-liberal, and I know that doesn’t make sense to you. I’m just simply following the text. God does allow for remarriage. In Deuteronomy divorce was permitted because of the hardness of men’s heart. Men put out their wives without a bill of divorcement. Because women were not educated they had no way to support themselves, so they were forced to either become prostitutes or to take the risk of deception, pretending to be not married and hope another man would marry them. In either case, whether it be living with a man without the benefit of marriage or with it, it was adultery because the previous marriage had not ended. If discovered a woman could be stoned for the sin of adultery.

Moses declared that such was wrong and it was wrong to put do this to a wife. An expelled wife was put into a precarious and difficult position. Therefore, because of the hardness of men’s hearts Moses permitted a bill of divorcement. Moses said to all husband that they could not just send away their wives; they first had to write a bill of divorcement and included in that bill of divorcement was the text that the wife was now free to remarry.

Listen to what Moses says:

“When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favor in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man’s wife.” (Deuteronomy 24:1-2)

Divorce was permitted and so was remarriage, meaning divorce ended a marriage just like death. Those who believe that marriage can be ended only one way, by death, is simply not following the law of God. Both Jesus and Paul agree with this and do not contradict the law of God. Jesus

said, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.”

He had to obey every jot and tittle on our behalf for He is our righteousness. He could not contradict. So Jesus is agreeing with Moses. In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul says that if an unbelieving spouse wishes to no longer remain married to his or her Christian spouse, then the Christian is free to allow the unbelieving spouse to leave. Paul says the Christian therefore can remarry. Here’s what he says,

“But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace.” (1 Corinthians 7:15)

I know what I said about divorce, it’s a sin. In this case it would be sin on the part of the nonbeliever. The Christian spouse would be without sin. They’re not wanting the marriage to end; it’s the unbelieving spouse that’s initiates separation. In this case it is a result of sin. Divorce always is. But if the unbelieving partner won’t be reconciled there is nothing you can do, and so the Apostle Paul says, let them go. Don’t keep trying to hang on when they clearly don’t want to be in the marriage. The apostle uses the word bondage. The Christian spouse is not in bondage. The word *bondage* comes from the same Greek root the word *bound* used in Romans 7:2 comes from.

“For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to [her] husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of [her] husband.” (Romans 7:2)

As long as a woman’s husband lives she is legally bound to remain faithful to him and stay in the marriage. She is not free or released to go to another person, she is under the bondage of her marriage covenant. It would appear then the word bondage in 1 Corinthians 7:15 is the exact word in Romans 7:2. If death dissolves the marriage, then Paul is saying when an unbelieving spouse departs and leaves desertion does the same thing that death does, it no longer keeps the faithful spouse in bondage. They are now released.

I want to ask you a question. Why would Jesus keep a faithful child of His under the bondage of a covenant that has already been put to death by one of its partners and say you have to live sexually pure now even though you don’t have the gift of celibacy? Would you please explain that to me? Paul does. Paul says if the unbeliever leaves it frees the believer from having to remain single. Should the believer be punished by celibacy because of the wickedness of someone else? He answers clearly, 1 Corinthians 7:2:

“Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.”

Why is he advocating marriage? To keep the innocent spouse, as well as single people, out of sexual sins. He continues to in verses eight and nine to warn against prolonged sexual abstinence.

He says to a husband and wife, if they are fasting from their sexual relationship, not to go too long lest they become tempted by the devil. What is a person to do who has been married and has enjoyed the beauty of God's gift—sexuality—and now because of the sin of another can't enjoy sex anymore? Are they just to turn that part of their lives off? Look what he says in eight and nine:

“But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.”

The word *unmarried* is an important word. It is not a word referring to virgins. Paul uses the word *virgin* throughout chapter to refer to people who have never been married, but he uses a different word here to refer to someone who is single, which would include a divorced person and not only divorced people but also widows. They too are single. One singled by divorce, another singled by death. Those are the two ways a marriage ends.

Friends, this is so plain, but our theological prejudices and traditions so colors the way we read these verses that we can't hear what God is saying and we hold people in bondage. Forget about deacons and elders right now, we tell people who are just members of the church who have gone through this tragedy—it doesn't matter what the reason is—*I'm sorry, you're just going to have to know how to handle your body and go to the Lord and burn with passion.* Friends, that is not the nature of our God.

I'm very respectful to people who disagree with me on this because I have friends who disagree with me on this issue. But I always want to remind them that they are flirting with Pharisaism. Every one of us is susceptible to being dangerously close if not guilty of thinking and acting like a Pharisee. Do you remember what Jesus said? “I desire mercy rather than sacrifice.” He reminded the Pharisees to whom He was speaking of David when he and his men were hungry did something prohibited by God. They ate the bread that was reserved for the priests. David's act was a violation of the law of God. God, in the case of David and his men, allowed them to eat of that bread and there was no sin attributed to them, why? Because they were starving. God was not interested in that moment in preserving the rule, He was interested in preserving David and his men and their life. The law of life trumps the law of the shewbread. That's what Jesus meant when He said I'd rather see mercy than sacrifice.

Divorce is also a violation of the law of God. But God is more interested in preserving the life of an innocent spouse than He is the law of marriage. Marriage was created for man not man for marriage.

Therefore, it is my humble opinion that a man divorced can still qualify to serve as a deacon because he does not have a previous wife to whom he is still married. Divorce ends a marriage. Jesus said to the Samaritan women, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” She answered, “I have no husband.” Jesus said, “You have correctly said, ‘I don't have a husband . . . for you've had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.’” Jesus recognized that each one of those men were her husband, how could He do so if divorce does

not legally end the marriage? If I am wrong and the others are right He should have said, “that’s correct, you have one husband and five adulterous relationships.” But He didn’t. He acknowledged each one was a husband because Moses and the law of God permitted divorce and remarriage.

Lets go back to the text and I’ll bring this to a conclusion. The “husband of one wife” can be translated “a one-woman man.” Although this qualification would disqualify a polygamist because he’s got more than one wife at the same time, it’s not just to be understood to be a statement against polygamy, nor is it allowing the possibility that a deacon can go through several wives. The meaning is that he loves and is passionately devoted to his present wife. He is a man who nurtures and cherishes the gift God has given him. A deacon is one who makes the wife he now has feel as if she is the most important person in his life with the exception of Jesus Christ. That’s what the qualification is. I believe these four men do that. They don’t do it perfectly, nor do I, but they do it consistently. In the case of divorce and remarriage this qualification would not rule out a divorced or remarried man as a deacon, however, with some stipulations.

One of the men we are presenting to you today, as you know, was married and divorced before he was saved, and we have several tests we presented him and will use if necessary in the future.

The first test—was the divorce before salvation? If so, it should have no bearing one way or the other. Did you hear me? If divorce occurred before conversion, in our brother’s case, then right to reach back into the blood of Jesus Christ and pull this sin out and hold it over him. This is my problem with man-made traditions: it violates the nature of redemption and who God is.

What kind of message do we want to send to the culture at large, to those who are lost? Do we want to say God is so gracious that He can forgive even the most heinous of sins: divorce, adultery, homosexuality, murder, gossip, lying, cheating? Do we believe in the grace of God that He has removed our sins as far as the east is from the west? Or do we want to say to the world that you can be forgiven BUT ...? Let it be on the record that Oak Grove Baptist Church has no “but” in our statement about the grace of God. We want to project to the world that our God is absolutely gracious and forgives all sin.

If you are wondering why I listed divorce with homosexuality and why would I have the audacity to bring up lying and lump it in there, it is because sin is sin. That doesn’t mean some sins don’t have worse consequences. Divorce has some severe consequences; just ask anyone who has gone through it. Sometimes the consequences are life-long. Many of you have sinned in such a way, before you were saved, that you still live with those consequences today.

The second test, if the divorce was because of infidelity, unfaithfulness by the wife, then that should not disqualify the candidate. I don’t understand churches; I’ll be honest with you. This really happened: A church had a pastor, he had been there just a few short years and one day his wife left him and said, “I don’t want to be married to you, I want to be out of the ministry. And, by the way, I’ve been a closet homosexual and I’ve found somebody I love and I’m going to go live with her.” It really happened. Do you know what that church did? They really showed the love of

God. They fired him. Friends, this ought not to be in the house of God! I think we do what Jesus said of the Pharisees, we nullify the commands of God with our traditions.

Finally, if he is remarried, the length of his present marriage and his devotion to his present wife must be considered. His godliness and sexual purity must be factors carefully analyzed. This doesn't mean that the past is immaterial. If the candidate has a proven track record of marriage problems then he would be disqualified. Meaning, if he has been divorced and remarried and divorced and remarried again, I would say he has some issues that need to be dealt with, so we must take these case by case.

III. Oak Grove's Ministry of Mercy

What are these men going to do and what is that going to look like? They are going to oversee ministry teams to minister to specific types of needs.

1. Assisted Living/Nursing Home.

These men are going to form those ministries. You may be asked to serve if you have the gifts of mercy and service. But they will lead. We're not asking these men to do all this work by themselves, we're asking them to oversee it. They are ministers and they do have oversight in this area of the church.

2. Hospital Visitation Ministry

You say that's my job as pastor, I understand that. I can biblically argue that, but I'm not going to. I will submit that I should come and visit you. I want to come, I just don't want to stay very long. But this new ministry will help, because, as I've said before, Greg and Bobby can do it so much better than I. I've never been with either of them on a hospital visit but I know they have those gifts. My wife does it better than I do, because she has those gifts.

3. Ministry of the Ushers

The ushers are going to do more than take up the offerings. Why is this under the office of mercy and service? Because these men are going to help assist you in many other ways.

4. They are going to create and form, as God leads them in prayer, a Benevolent Ministry.

a. Meals to the sick, families with new babies, etc.

b. Gifts to the Needy

When one of you in the church has a legitimate need, how are we to minister to that financial

need? It is my responsibility that you are ministered to but I am giving that oversight to these brothers as the apostles did in Acts 6 and it will be their responsibility to get you what you need. I don't know how they're going to do it at this point. I've left that to these four men. I'm very much comfortable in trusting that God can lead these four men and tell them how to do the ministry, they don't need that from me.

If you have a financial need I'm asking you strongly: do not go to another person in this church. You are to go to one of these four men and let them know. We do not want people calling other people asking for money or sharing their financial needs. That's what these four men are for. They will take care of legitimate needs. That protects our congregation.

c. Financial Counseling for Those in Need.

It's not helping a person to continually give them money—it's not biblical. We're not here to enable people; we're here to help. Part of that help will be education. They will instruct those who need it the principles of financial management. Or it might be to help them with an employment search, but these brothers will do this for us. And not just for those within this church, this ministry will also extend to people outside of our church. So if you know of a neighbor or person who is really in need and believe it is an opportunity for this church to serve, let one of these four men know that. It doesn't mean they will help them, but they will take it under prayer advisement and seek the mind of the Lord.

As I conclude I hope you can see what this ministry of mercy will do to further the ministry to the needs of our own members and people outside of Oak Grove. In my first sermon this year I said we must structure ourselves to grow if we really believe God is going to give us a harvest. We must believe that God wants us to be fruitful and therefore prepare for it. I believe He wants us to be fruitful. I believe there is coming a harvest. It's one of the promises He has made and is watching over to perform it at the precise moment.

Let's suppose that this excruciating drought continued all the way to next year's planting season. I hope not. God forbid this drought last that long. But let's say it does. Farmers would then have to make a difficult decision to invest in planting or not.

Two farmers, both Christians say they believe God is going to send rain but only one of the men tills up the soil and plants the seed. Which one of them believes God is going to send rain? The one that prepares for it. This new ministry of mercy is the next step for preparing our fields for the rain of the Spirit and the harvest of God. The Bible says in Acts 6 that after the apostles ordained the seven men the church once again began to grow and many were added to it. This is one of several steps that God has laid on my heart that will prepare us for a future harvest. So therefore, with joy, I commend these four brothers for your prayerful consideration and confirmation. Amen.