



## Leadership Forum • December 3, 2011 “Deacons”

### RESOURCES

- *Evangelism: Doing Justice and Preaching Grace*, by Harvie Conn
- *Christian Charity: or, the Duty of Charity of the Poor, Explained and Enforced*, by Jonathan Edwards
- *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road*, by Timothy Keller
- *Resources for Deacons: Love Expressed through Mercy Ministries*, by Timothy Keller
- *With Justice for All: A Strategy for Community Development*, by John Perkins
- *The New Testament Deacon: The Church's Minister of Mercy*, by Alexander Strauch

### WHAT IS A DEACON? WHAT DO DEACONS DO?

[Edwards] “I know of scarce any duty which is so much insisted on, so pressed and urged upon us, both in the Old Testament and New, as this duty of charity to the poor.”

[Keller] “What does the Bible say about a family or church which says ‘our job is just to preach the gospel’ but does not involve itself in a ‘social concern’? The ministry of mercy is essential to Christian love and lifestyle. Even though the ministry of mercy aims at physical needs, it is a spiritual ministry to physical needs!

[BCO 9]

[Strauch] “My heartfelt burden is to help deacons get out of the boardroom or the building-maintenance mentality and into the people-serving mentality. Deacons, as the New Testament teaches and as some of the sixteenth-century reformers discovered, are to be involved in a compassionate ministry of caring for the poor and needy. *The deacons’ ministry, therefore, is one that no Christ-centered, New Testament church can ever afford to neglect.*”

[Strauch] “In the New Testament, deacons are always in close relationship with the shepherds of the church. Like the shepherds, they are required to meet specific qualifications... they must be officially examined and approved... they hold an official position of trust in the congregation. Unlike the shepherds of the church, however, deacons do not teach or govern as part of their position. They are servant-officers who relieve the shepherds of the multitude of practical duties that are required in caring for a congregation. The two offices of overseer and deacon are separate but complementary. The shepherd-elders must give their primary attention to teaching and leading the people. Deacons must give their primary attention to caring for the people’s physical welfare... In contemporary language, they are the congregation’s social workers.”

[Strauch] “When the local church compassionately cares for peoples’ needs, the world sees a visible display of Christ’s love, which will draw some people to the Savior.”

### QUALIFICATIONS FOR DEACONS

[1 Tim. 3:8-13] <sup>8</sup> Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. <sup>9</sup> They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. <sup>10</sup> And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. <sup>11</sup> Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. <sup>12</sup> Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. <sup>13</sup> For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

[BCO 57-5] Membership vows

[BCO 24] Ordination requirements

*Comprehension, Capability, Character, Calling.*

## A Biblical Foundation for Social Justice

by Eric Costa

The Gospel of Jesus Christ effects every aspect of this fallen world, every area of our lives. Some reduce the Church's message to a "social gospel," and the Church's mission to relief of felt needs. That reduction is wrong, and ignores the eternal ramifications of what God has done and said. But the Christ-centered Gospel *does* create earthly changes. Marital and work relationships improve "naturally" (or "supernaturally") as an effect of the Gospel in the lives of believers. So too do relationships improve with the poor, the lonely, the oppressed, the estranged, the outcast—the *other*. We need to know how those relational changes truly come about, and how they serve the purposes of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

All those who believe in Jesus have been born of God (John 1:12-13), made alive together with Christ (Eph. 2:4-5), and given the Spirit and a new heart (Ezek. 36:26-27). God has radically changed us in his mercy, and has given us a hope that does not disappoint because his love has already been poured out into our hearts through the Spirit (Rom. 5:5). The revealed mystery of Christ in us is the hope of glory (Col. 1:25-27), and we have been sealed by the Spirit for this glorious future inheritance of eternal fellowship with God (Eph. 1:13-14). There is no race, class, or gender division in Christ (Gal. 3:28), but all are one body (Eph. 4:4), one holy temple of the Lord (Eph. 2:19-22), a people of God to proclaim his excellencies (1 Pet. 2:9), and children through Christ to the praise of the glory of God's grace (Eph. 1:5-6).

Built up on the foundation of Christ (1 Cor. 3:11), we are those who worship God with our lives (Rom. 12:1-2), in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24)—for such worshipers the Father seeks. He does not want our lip service (Is. 29:13-14), but our hearts. Our religion and worship are a stench to God if done from a heart far from him. But what is *good* religion and worship?

"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (Jas. 1:27). "Is this not the fast [i.e., costly religious practice] that I [the LORD] choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and *not to hide yourself from your own flesh*? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn..." (Is. 58:6-8a, emphasis mine).

The thing to remember here is that *we are of the same flesh with the poor and suffering of the world*. Are we any better than they? Did God see something in us that was absent in them, that he would give *us* life and health? Does the color of our skin, the money in our wallets, the clothing we wear, or the home in which we live have anything to do with who receives favor from the Lord?

We need to come to the realization that *we* were bound and yoked by wickedness, *we* were oppressed by our own sin, *we* were spiritually hungry and thirsty, *we* were spiritually homeless and naked and destitute... and that *we* are mercifully blessed beyond imagining through the Gospel of God's free grace. "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). When we get the Gospel, and how it came to spiritually bankrupt people like us, then we begin to understand the poor, their needs, and how we can extend the love of Christ to them.

Compassionate effort toward social justice, when done from a heart close to God, is a major part of the worship God seeks. So let us not withhold the favor we have freely received—whether spiritual or material—from those in need. Let us not sing and pray and fast while ignoring the sufferings of those around us. Rather, let us show that we are indeed in the true faith of God by our good works (Jas. 2:14-26), for which we were created in Christ (Eph. 2:10). Let us eagerly remember the poor (Gal. 2:10). Let us work hard, so that we will have something to share with those who have none (Eph. 4:28). Let us labor mightily with the power (Col. 1:28-29) and the grace (1 Cor. 15:10) of God, to bring the light of the Gospel to every person. Let us hold our faith without an attitude of personal favoritism (Jas. 2:1-13), but pursue Christ in and above all things (Phil. 3:7-11), especially those small things that might benefit the least of individuals (Matt. 25:31-46).

"Whoever serves is to do so as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (1 Pet. 4:11).