

## SEMINAR: THE GOSPEL AND THE DEACON

Chris Hutchinson, Sr. Pastor, Grace Covenant PCA, Blacksburg, VA

### I. The Problem

- A. Deacons appear to be inferior to elders in function and authority (BCO 8-9); why then should they be ordained?
- B. WCF 30.2 describes officers as those who hold “the keys to the kingdom,” which deacons do not (cf. also BCO Preliminary Principle 3).
- C. Many classic Presbyterian ecclesiastical studies (e.g. Smythe, Bannermann) do not defend nor discuss what it means for deacons to be *officers* in the Church.
- D. Many of the older proof-text arguments lack depth and persuasiveness (ex. I Pet 4:11)
- E. The pragmatic argument from Acts 6 does not do full justice to a theology of office.
- F. The Real Question: is anything really lost if we have deacons, but do not ordain them?

II. Thesis: We *ordain* deacons to demonstrate the true nature of Christ’s power in the church; so that the Word which the elders proclaim may be *officially* adorned by Deeds of service.

### III. Argument

- A. The Offices of Christ represented in the Church

#### OFFICES OF CHRIST (WSC 42-45)

	<b>PROPHET</b>	<b>PRIEST</b>	<b>KING</b>
<b>Member</b>	Col. 3:16	I Pet. 2:9	I Cor 6:3
<b>Office: Elder</b>	Lead in teaching	Lead in praying	Lead in ruling

#### HUMILIATION OF CHRIST (WSC 42, 46)

	<b>LAW-KEEPER</b>	<b>SACRIFICE</b>	<b>SERVANT</b>
<b>Member</b>	Eph. 5:1-2	Rom. 12:2	Phil 2:1-11
<b>Office: Deacon</b>	Lead in obeying	Lead in sacrificing	Lead in serving

- B. The Nature of Christ’s power in the Church

1. Christ commits His power to the whole Body, both ruled and rulers (cf. I Pet. 2:9; BCO 2-1)
2. Christ appoints particular men to represent this power as His officers (cf. Eph. 4:11ff; I Tim. 3; Tit. 1)
3. In terms of what this power looks like, the Church and the Christian life should imitate Christ *in His first coming*, not His second; in other words, humiliation. (I Cor. 1:18-31; 4:1-13; II Cor. 11-12; Phil. 2:1-11; Col. 1:24; I Peter 1:13; 5:1-6)
4. Therefore, it is the glory of the Church to have men who officially represent Christ’s office of humiliation in the Church as deacons

5. Thus, deacons exercise real spiritual authority in the Church, which is “the power of order” which is distinct from “the power of jurisdiction” which elders alone exercise in church courts. But both kinds of power minister Christ’s authority and mercy to the Church and are equally important (BCO 3-2; 9-2).

6. Why then a distinct office to represent Christ in His humiliation? This is where the wisdom of the Apostles in Acts 6 is seen, not just practically, but theologically. As no one man can represent Christ fully, so it pleased God to give two offices to the Church, so that the ministry of the Word is *officially* adorned by the ministry of Deed. So, it should not surprise us that the first deacons should be “filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom,” nor that they are ordained to office.

#### C. The Nature of Redemption

1. Salvation comes by the verbal proclamation and hearing of the Gospel (Romans 10; WCF 14.1) and is for the saving of souls for everlasting life

2. And yet, as heaven will be a physical reality with resurrected bodies; so physical ministry plays a crucial part in adorning this salvation.

3. Therefore, caring for physical needs plays a critical role in the life of the church (Acts 2:42ff; Acts 4:32ff; Acts 20:35; Gal 2:10; James 1:27ff).

4. It thus follows that there are two parallel offices to illustrate the nature of redemption encompassing both soul and body.

#### D. Other arguments for considering Deacons officers worthy of ordination

1. The parallel mention of deacons alongside elders in Phil. 1:1 and I Tim. 3.

2. Two of the “proto-deacons” of Acts 6 were honored with great ministries: Stephen (martyrdom) and Philip (Ethiopian; some say that Philip was no longer a deacon, but an “evangelist,” cf. Acts 21:8; Eph 4:11; II Tim 4:5)

3. Jesus calls Himself a deacon (“table server”) in Luke 22:27 (so Keller).

4. Jesus demonstrates “the power of order” in His fulfillment of the messianic office described in Isaiah 61: ministering to the sick, prisoners & oppressed.

#### E. Possible weaknesses in the argument

1. Elders are surely to represent Christ in His humiliation, as well as deacons

2. Hand layings in Acts are not all ordinations (cf. Acts 8:17; 13:3)

3. Others:

#### IV. Resources

1) Wayne Sparkman’s excellent assembly of historical deaconal materials at the PCA Historical Center, available online at <http://www.pcahistory.org/topicalresources/index.html>.

2) John Calvin, *Christian Institutes*, 4.3-4.

3) Thomas Smyth, *An Ecclesiastical Catechism of the Presbyterian Church* (Leavitt & Trow, 1843)

4) James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (Still Waters Revival Books, reprint 1991; org. 1869)

5) John L. Girardeau, *The Importance of the Office of Deacon in The South. Presb. Review*, Vol. 32.1 (January 1881)

6) Don K. Clements, *Biblical Church Government* (Metokos Press, 2003)

7) Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (InterVarsity Press, 1995)

8) Sean Michael Lucas, *On Being Presbyterian* (P&R Publishing, 2006)

9) L. Roy Taylor, *Who Runs the Church?: four views on church government*, ed. Stephen Cowan (Zondervan, 2004)

10) Tim Keller, *Ministries of Mercy* (P&R Publishing, 1997).

11) CN Wilborn, *The Deacon as a Divine Right Office* in *The Confessional Presbyterian*, Vol. 5 (2009)