

# BAHRAIN REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

## *The Diaconate I*

July 5, 2024

### Origin of the Office

OT Nethinim: Used in Ezra and Nehemiah... cf. Ezra 8:20 = מִנִּיתִים

- A group of people of non-Jewish background who served as Temple servants in OT times
- As assistant to the Levites, they performed such menial chores as cleaning the Temple, carrying water and wood to the Altar, and scrubbing utensils used in the sacrificial ceremonies.

NT Deacons: Acts 6:1-6 = ... *the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. <sup>3</sup>Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. <sup>4</sup>But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."*

Background: The need for the Seven (deacons) to be chosen arose from the growth of the church... Act 2:41, 47; 5:14

- The Greek –speaking Jewish widows were being neglected
- The Apostles realized that they are become distracted from their primary calling of preaching the Word of God
- These only shows the limitations of the apostles through their humanity

Terminology: The word *serve/attend* is διακονεῖν (*diakonein*) = the word for the office is διάκονος (*diakonos*)

- Usage: To wait at table; to attend to household needs = to serve in general
- Focus: Object of service, and not the status of a mere servant of elders and members of the church

### Rationale:

- (a) The need to administer the temporal affairs of the church

Note: The church has temporal affairs that can complement, or hinder, its more spiritual concerns

Point: The deacon(s) must look after the temporary concerns of the church as a prerequisite to maintaining the priority of the ministry

- Facilities: Responsible for the basic management of the church... i.e., Preparing the place of worship = cleaning, sound system, etc.
- Benevolence: Involved in administrating funds... i.e., for the needy, prisoners, support to other church's ministry
- Finances: Involved in collecting and counting the offering, record keeping, helping to set the church budget, etc.
- Ushers: Responsible for distributing bulletins, seating the congregation, preparing the elements for communion, etc.
- Logistic: Deacons should be available to help in a variety of ways so that the elders are able to concentrate on teaching and shepherding the church

- (b) The need to unburden the ministry of the Word

Point 1: Benevolence is a valid mandate of the church

Point 2: Benevolence is subordinate to the ministry of the Word

- Deacons are responsible to ensure that the pastor is unencumbered in his ministerial duties
- By extension, deacons must be sensitive to the practical equipment of the pastor for his ministry
- As an extension of the pastorate, the diaconate is a genuinely spiritual ministry [Richard Longenecker, *Expositors Bible Commentary*] – “The words ‘full of the Spirit and wisdom’ evidently refer to guidance by the Holy Spirit and skill in administration and business, which, singly and together, are so necessary in Christian service. While Christian ministers which such qualities were more characteristic of their own boards and councils, it is only fair to say that boards and councils often wish their minister were given more ‘to prayer and the ministry of the word!’”

### Wrong Orientation:

- (a) Corporation Orientation: Deacons are treated as executives/directors of the Church

Beware: The legal requirements of the government can be imposed as the pattern of church order

Point: The legal components of church organization must not rival the NT-based structure of its order

- Deacons are not the financial or proprietary directors of the church
- They are the church's servants, and the elders assistants, in the disposition of church finances/property

- (b) Political Orientation: The diaconate is treated as check-and-balance to the pastorate

Beware: The Eldership and the diaconate can erode into two seats of competing influences in the church

Point: Deacons exist to support elders, not as a co-ordinate power to the elder

[Edward Hiscox, *Principles and Practices for Baptist Churches*, 115] – “Deacons should be watchful guardians of the purity and good order of the churches, striving to maintain a healthful tone of piety and Christian activity in the body. But they do not constitute a coordinate branch for the administration of its government, and in the exercise of their functions must act only in conjunction with the pastor, not independent of him, possibly except in very rare and urgent cases. Hence, while it is desirable for the pastor to have meetings with his deacons often or statedly for consultation and advice, it is not proper for them to hold meeting as a ‘board of deacons,’ independent of and without the advice of the pastor.”

***“Faithful deacons should see their fingerprints in the unity of their congregation, for which Jesus prayed (John 17:22)”***

~ Matt Smethurst, *Deacons*, p. 132