

Appointing Deacons And Elders



Foundations (Day 265)
by Derek Prince

It remains to consider one further use, recorded in the New Testament, of the ordinance of laying on of hands. This use is somewhat similar to that which we have just examined. We find the example in Acts 6:1-6:

> "Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a murmuring against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. 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. 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; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.' And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them."

Here we have an account of the appointment of seven men to an administrative office in the church at Jerusalem. By the common consent of almost all interpreters, it is agreed that the office to which these men were appointed was that which came to be designated by the official title of "deacon." We find that the appointment of these men as deacons was made effective through the laying on of hands by the church leaders.

In order to understand this procedure more clearly, it is necessary to acknowledge the structure of leadership in the local church of the New Testament. This basic structure was extremely simple. It consisted of two – and only two – classes of administrative officers. These two classes were elders and deacons. There's a lot of confusion today about this, with words as 'bishop', 'overseer', etc. Let me just point out that the Greek word used, where either 'bishop' or 'overseer' is

translated, is exactly the same: 'episkopos'. Moreover, in In 1 Peter 5:2 he writes to the elders and says: "Shepherd the flock of God ... serving as overseers." The same persons are called both elders and overseers.

The word deacon, in its original form, means a "servant." In Acts 6:2 the primary task of the deacons is to serve tables – that is, to minister to the material needs of the congregation. In doing this, they were also serving the apostles.

The procedure for appointing deacons is outlined in Acts 6:3-6. The apostles delegated to the congregation as a whole the responsibility for choosing from among their own number men suited to fill the office of deacon. After these men had been chosen by the congregation, they were brought before the apostles, who first prayed over them and then laid hands upon them.

This act of laying hands upon the deacons served three main purposes.

1. The apostles publicly acknowledged thereby that they accepted these men as fit to hold the office of deacon.
2. They publicly committed these men to God for the task for which they had been chosen.
3. They transmitted to these men a measure of their own spiritual grace and wisdom needed for the task that they had to carry out. Two of these men appointed as deacons – Stephen and Philip – subsequently developed outstanding spiritual ministries of their own.

Devotional

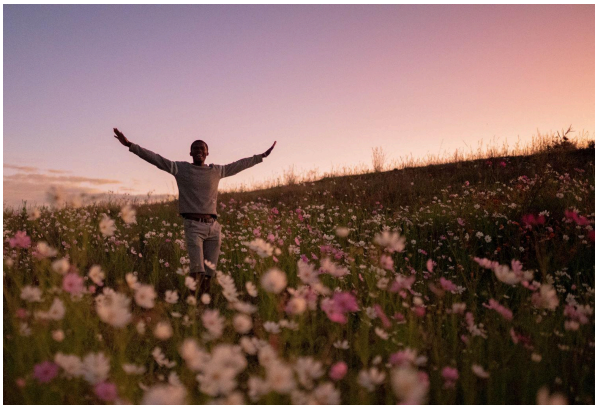
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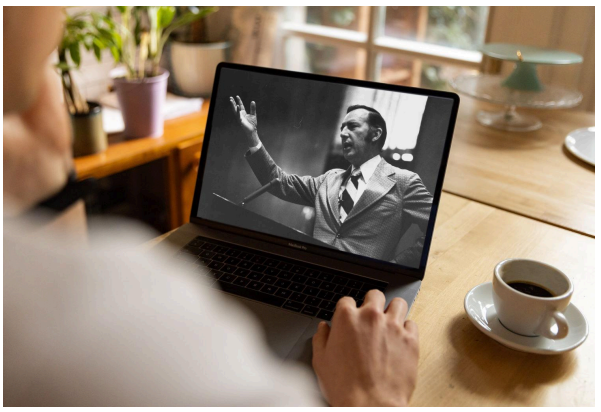
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