

# Directing Deacons

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*Detailed Outline*

*Part 2 of 3*

## Introduction

### A. When I was in college, I had a fascinating economics professor.

1. He had served in World War II, and he was stationed on a small island with 200 other men.
2. 800 Japanese troops took over the island, and my professor and the other men were taken as prisoners of war.
3. While he was a POW in Japan, he took responsibility for the distribution of the food to the POWs. He had to be very exact and make sure that all the men got enough food.

### B. My point is, people get very touchy about their food in different situations of distress! That is the issue that threatens the unity of the church in Acts 6:1–7, feeding the widows in the early church.

## I. The Problem

### A. The background

*<sup>42</sup>They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup>Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. <sup>44</sup>And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup>and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. <sup>46</sup>Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, <sup>47</sup>praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42–47 NASB)*

1. There were many believers, and in the new church, there was joy, unity, worship, and growth.
2. The people were also characterized by generosity. It appears that the saints shared individually with each other (Acts 2:44–45).
3. As any church grows, there is more administration required for the charitable giving. So later, we find the apostles administering and distributing charity (Acts 4:34–35; see Gal. 2:10, James 1:27).
4. Although it is beyond the scope of our study, in Acts 11:30, we see the elders are now the ones who receive the charitable giving from the church.

### B. Things quickly get busy for the apostles.

1. The apostles were heavily engaged in teaching (Acts 2:42) and in evangelism (including the working of miracles – Acts 2:43, Acts 3).
2. They were also under attack and being persecuted by the unbelieving Jewish leaders (Acts 4–5).

3. Then, too, there was the discipline of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11).

4. Soon, there would be travel as well (see Peter and John in Acts 8:14ff.).

**C. One can easily see that the apostles would not have been physically present when the widows were being fed in Acts 6.**

1. One can imagine that the actual feeding program was run by the native Hebrews, who were residents of Jerusalem.
2. The Hellenistic widows may not have been such long-time residents, or were merely sojourners. It seemed as though they got the short-end of the distribution of food.
3. As a result, the Hellenistic Jews and the native Hebrews began to be at odds – not so much the widows themselves, but the two ethnic groups as a whole.
4. There were accusations of favoritism and a growing animosity. Soon, it was no longer an issue of inequality, but a problem of disunity.

**D. It is not a surprise that the apostles were not there to oversee the distribution.**

1. Often, in a church there is the expectation or even demand that the elders ought to be everywhere that ministry is going on.
2. The apostles are not directly accused, but they “own” the problem. (The unity of the church, not to mention the care of widows, was a very important matter.)

## **II. The Solution**

**A. The apostles determined they could solve this problem by delegation, not direct involvement.**

1. They determined this because they had priorities.
2. They were not overcome by a “tyranny of the urgent.” They saw through the problem, but they didn’t decide to deal with it with their own hands.

**B. Establishing the seven deacons**

1. The apostles gather the whole congregation.
2. They declare their priorities: prayer and the ministry of the Word. They explain why they wouldn’t directly seek to oversee the problem.
3. They establish a leadership group to oversee the administration of the feeding.
4. They set the number of men needed: seven.
5. They set forth the qualifications (which are substantial).
6. They allow the congregation to choose the men, based on these standards.
7. They publicly commission these men, laying their hands on them.
  - a) It is important to note that these men weren’t commissioned to specifically wait tables themselves.
  - b) They were commissioned to oversee that ministry.

### **III. Observations**

- A. The apostles rightly perceive the significance and urgency of the problem.**
- B. The apostles see this as part of their responsibility:**
  - 1. They assume responsibility.
  - 2. They designate leadership and publicly bestow authority.
  - 3. They lay hands on the seven (identifying with them—in effect, the seven are acting with the apostles' authority and in their place).
  - 4. Here's the surprise: they leave the seven to do their job without trying to micromanage them.
- C. Our problem is that we are looking for a text that describes the relationship of the elders to the deacons, and yet neither elders nor deacons are named herein this text.**
- D. How then does this apply to elders and to deacons?**