

## A Charge to Keep

If you're like me, you can look back over your life and see special days that stand out above others. I'm talking about those days that kind of "glow" in your memory because they were days when life-changing things happened. For me days like this include August 14, 1964—the day I got saved. April 19, 1974, the day I got married. December 30, 1975 and October 6, 1978, the days that our boys were born. I'm sure you know what I'm talking about—in fact, I imagine that even now you're thinking of the "stand out days" in your own life. Well, another one of the days that stands out in my memory is May 20, 1989. That was the day I graduated from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

There were about 200 in my graduating class and on that special day we were all packed into Levell Chapel along with the faculty and a several hundred family and friends. It was a hot day in New Orleans, and it was quite uncomfortable in those caps and gowns. Besides receiving that degree I had worked and studied so hard for that day, something else stands out in my mind that made that day special. It was also Elaine's birthday. And to surprise her and make her feel special that day too, here is what I did. I was third in line as we walked in, so I made sure she sat on the end of the pew on the aisle. As we walked in, I stopped the line where she was, stepped out of line and kissed her and handed her a birthday present. Then I got back in line and the ceremony resumed. It was a pretty special day for us all.

I remember that one of the hymns we sang that day in the ceremony was "A Charge to Keep, I Have." I want to read you the words to that hymn because they express so beautifully how I felt that day as I was setting out to fulfill the call of God upon my life. The hymn, written by Charles Wesley, goes like this:

*A charge to keep I have, A God to glorify,  
A never-dying soul to save, And fit it for the sky.  
To serve the present age, My calling to fulfill;  
O may it all my pow'rs engage To do my Master's will!  
Arm me with watchful care As in Thy sight to live  
And now Thy servant, Lord prepare A strict account to give!  
Help me to watch and pray, And still on Thee rely  
O let me not Thy trust betray, But press to realms on High.*

That hymn describes something of what we are doing here tonight...Tonight is a special night because we are ordaining one of God's servants. Jimmy Fairbanks has answered God's call to serve Him as a deacon in this church—and because you have, you also have a charge to keep. Tonight I want to remind you Jimmy of those tasks you are charged with as a deacon. First, you are charged to:

### **1. Love Jesus.**

Loving Jesus is far more than just saying you love Him. Loving Jesus will show up in your striving every day to be more and more like Him in your thoughts, words, and actions. The great missionary, Adoniram Judson, was once asked by reporters if it were true that people were comparing him to the Apostle Paul. He replied, "If that be true, I am sorry that is being said: I don't want to be like Paul; I want to be like Jesus." Jimmy, that should be your mind set. You are not being called to be like me or Robert Wages, or Lawrence

Barton. You are being called to fulfill your calling as a deacon by becoming more and more like Jesus. That means that by this time next year you will look, talk, act and think more like Jesus that you do today. In order to do that, you'll have to submerge yourself in those tried and true spiritual disciplines of daily prayer and Bible study, or private and public worship, of showing kindness and mercy and being a faithful witness. As Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:11 (NIV), "...*pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.*"

Jimmy, you're going to have to become spiritually strong because you've been called to a job that is impossible to do without the power of God. You see, in the years to come, not only will you be lifted up as an example of spiritual maturity that others can follow...and you certainly will...you will also be asked to help the hurting, minister to the sick, and counsel those who need direction in life. Deaconing the right way is a challenging and often difficult ministry that lasts a lifetime.

In fact I would say that tonight you are being charged with supernatural tasks—things that will be impossible for you to do on your own strength. Jimmy, you can no more be an effective deacon on your own than Peter could walk on water on his own. So, like Peter, you have to learn to keep your eyes on Jesus—to instinctively look to Him for strength and insight and wisdom every day.

I've had to learn to do that over the years in ministry. In fact, every time I try to do this job on my own ability I fall flat on my face. I have to constantly pray, "*God help me. I can't do this on my own, I need you every hour*" because I've learned that without His help and strength and perspective I'm nothing.

In the New Testament, there is a lot of information about deacons. But, the emphasis in those verses is on what deacons are to BE rather than on what they are to DO. This is because BEING always comes before DOING. Deacons are to BE growing toward spiritually maturity; they are to BE right with God, right with their family, and right with their fellow man before they can DO their jobs. So, I charge you to make it your goal to BE all you can BE for Jesus. Show your love for Him by striving to be more and more like Him. Make it your goal to grow spiritually.

Second, you are charged to:

## **2. Love the Church.**

We expect you to love and cherish the Sonoraville family and constantly strive to keep it healthy and strong. In other words, you are charged with doing all you can to keep our fellowship sweet. The book of Acts tells us that the incident in the early church that led to the formation of deacons in the first place was the absence of unity. People were grumbling and complaining because the Grecian widows felt they were being overlooked and even shortchanged in the daily distribution of food. Well, the office of deacon was God's answer to that problem. With the help of the first seven deacons, peace was restored and the church in Jerusalem increased its growth.

Just like those first seven deacons, you are charged with preserving the unity we enjoy here in this church. In fact Jimmy, that may very well be the most important thing you do as a deacon...because harmony in a

church is still one of the KEYS to health and growth. It is one of the “*foundational pillars*” on which God’s church is built.

There’s an old legend about the piece of ground upon which Solomon’s temple was built in Jerusalem. According to the tale, two brothers had farms that joined on the very place where the temple was eventually built. One of the brothers was married and had a family but the other was single. At harvest time one year, the married brother thought how lonely his single sibling must be without a family to keep him company. He thought, “*I’ll take some of my sheaves from my harvest and add them to his harvest. I cannot give him a wife and children, but I can make his life more pleasant by giving him some of the good things I have.*” Well, at the same time, the other brother thought to himself, “*My married brother has a family to support and his harvest may not be sufficient to care for his wife and children. I will share with him out of my abundant harvest.*” When harvest time rolled around, after the brothers returned from the fields to their respective homes, each gathered up an armload of sheaves, took them to the other’s barn, and stacked the sheaves with those already there. In the morning, each brother looked at his larger stack of sheaves and wondered why they had increased during the night. Then one night, when the moon was full, the truth came out. The brothers happened to meet on the road, with full arms, going to the other’s house to deposit his load of sheaves. And according to the legend, on that place, where love was shown so beautifully, Solomon built his temple.

Of course this is only a legend but there is a lesson here. You see, when members of a church love each other, and express that love in sacrificial acts—peace and joy grow in that fellowship and all are blessed. One of the reasons our church continues to attract people, I believe is because of the sweet, sweet spirit of fellowship that exists here. When visitors walk through these doors they feel our harmony and are drawn to it. Even our guest preacher a couple of weeks ago commented to me how sweet the fellowship was here. And it is that way among the deacons as well. There are no power struggles, no undercutting, no mistrust among the deacon fellowship, and we want to keep it that way.

We know how fragile unity and harmony can be. It can easily be damaged or destroyed by an idle word of gossip or by quarreling and grumbling and complaining. This is one of the devil’s favorite tools and you are to be on your guard to help thwart these kinds of attacks. Paul Powell once received a letter from a pastor in Africa whom he had met on a mission trip. The pastor wrote, “*We need prayers very badly in this area. The devil is working mightily for the first people to work in this station left the gospel and started quarreling. And you know where there is quarreling, the devil is there.*” We all need to remember that quarreling and grumbling are not spiritual gifts. It doesn’t take any musical ability to always be “harping” on something behind someone’s back. So, Jimmy, and all our deacons, you are all charged to be out among the people, preserving harmony...squashing gossip and rumors. You are to support one another and the church staff both publically and privately. You are to do all you can to guard and protect unity—like a soldier guards the gold at Ft. Knox.

The truth is, when a person becomes a deacon—or a pastor for that matter—they give up the right to promote a division in the life of the church in any fashion. When things arise that are divisive it is time for the deacon who believes that Jesus is his or her Lord and that the Bible is his or her authority in life...to stand up and say, “*We must have harmony and peace if we are to honor and obey Christ.*” It is in times like these that a deacon should remind the church that the Bible teaches that “*the peace of Christ is to rule in our hearts since as members of one body we are called to peace.*”

So...you are charged with loving Jesus...loving this church... and finally, you are charged to:

### **3. Love Your Families.**

Jimmy, as a deacon, you will learn that you have several tasks. Just next week, you will have the opportunity to serve the Lord’s Supper. You will have the task of helping me as your Pastor in ministry, there will be the tasks of visitation and benevolence. Sometimes you will have to serve as a counselor. But one of the most important tasks you will be given is to serve the families that are assigned to you. You will need to get to know these families. You will need to afford them the opportunity to get to know you. You will need to make yourself available to help them when necessary. Do your best to make sure no one falls through the cracks. I would remind you that the word “*deacon*” literally means “*servant*” so constantly look for ways to serve the families that are entrusted to your care. As Paul says in Galatians 5:13 (NIV) “*Serve one another in love.*”

Remember, Jesus said that when we serve others, we are serving Him. **Matthew 25:35-40 (NIV)** says, **35** “*For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ 37 “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ 40 “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’*”

Jimmy, you are charged to love on people in this way. Love the church in this way, and as you do, you will be loving on Jesus.