

Deacons - Qualifications and Work

A. The Office of Deacon

1 Timothy 3:8-13, Acts 6:1-6, Philippians 1:1-2,

B. The Work of Deacons

Acts 6:2-4

C. The Qualifications of Deacons – 1 Tim

1 Timothy 3:8-13

D. Questions and Answers

A. The Office of Deacon

The English term **deacon** occurs in only two passages in the NT. (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8-13). But the Greek word *diakonos* from which it is taken is found 30 times. In most cases *diakonos* is translated as "servant" rather than "deacon." In the Greek world, *diakonos* was used to describe the work of a servant—a person who waited on tables or ministered as a religious official. When the **office of deacon** was established in the New Testament church, it was a specific and official title or office for which men were to be qualified with both upright character and moral purity. Paul gave these qualifications in detail in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

1 Timothy 3:8-12 - 8 **Deacons likewise** must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, 9 but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 And let these also **first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach.** 11 Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. NASB

The origin of the office of deacon is usually related to the events described in Acts 6:1-6.

Acts 6:1-6 - Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. 2 And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. 3 "But **select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.** 4 "But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." 5 And the statement found approval with **the whole congregation; and they chose** Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a

proselyte from Antioch. 6 And these **they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.** NASB

The early church in Jerusalem was experiencing problems whereby the Apostles were being distracted by the many demands of organizing the practical needs of the church. In order to correct this problem, seven men were chosen by the congregation and presented to the apostles (Acts 6:1-6). Although these men were not called **deacons** at that time, the Greek word used to describe their work *diakoneo* comes from the same Greek root word.

While these men were appointed to serve the practical needs of the congregation, they nevertheless were required to be tested and be men who possessed the very highest moral and spiritual character. They are described as **“men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom”** (Acts 6:3). They were formally installed and commissioned in a service of prayer and the LAYING ON OF HANDS by the apostles (Acts 6:6) – this practice shows that this was an official title and office and required an ordination for **deacons** as church officials. The only other official title in the church is that of the **pastor-elder**, who are also formerly ordained as Paul and Barnabas were in Acts 13-2-3.

Acts 13:2-3 - 2 And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, **"Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."** 3 **Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them,** they sent them away. NASB

Therefore this important office of deacon is to be implemented in the local church for the health of the church, specifically for the proper organization and effectiveness in the ministry in the church. We also see the evidence that the office existed in the Philippian church as Paul addresses both the elders and the deacons in his salutation to the church.

Philippians 1:1-2 - 1 Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, **including the overseers and deacons:** 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. NASB

B. The Work of Deacons

These **deacons** then, carry out the work of the practical needs of the church. They organize and administrate the practical things that need to take place in order to free the pastor-elders to give themselves to the ministry of the Word of God and prayer. Of course the precedence for this arises from the origin of the office itself in Acts 6:2-4.

Acts 6:2-4 - 2 And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, **"It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order**

to serve tables. 3 "But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, **whom we may put in charge of this task.** 4 "But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word."

These **deacons** were to carry out the work of "*servicing tables*," in the case of Acts 6:2, but this was just one of many practical needs of a local church that need to be attended to. Moreover, this important work serves the purpose of freeing the pastor-elders to give themselves fully to the Word of God and prayer. This makes the pastor-elders work powerful and effective and strengthens the spiritual health of the entire congregation. The church needs effective and productive shepherds so that she will be *led* properly with godly vision, *taught* the Word of God with much diligence and accuracy, *healed* from the wounds of a fallen world, and *protected* from the false doctrine of so many false teachers in the world. In order for this to be accomplished, the pastor-elders need to be able to give themselves fully to the Word of God and prayer.

Therefore the **work of deacons** consists in the meeting the practical needs of the church by organizing, administrating and carrying out the work related to these needs. These practical needs can be, but not limited to;

- Handling of finances
- Handling of church building needs
- Handling of benevolence and charity to needy church members
- Handling the regular weekly meetings, ushers, offerings, serving of communion
- Visiting the sick, prayer and ministry to members needing counsel
- Teaching in the place of pastor-elders when the need arises

Of course the whole church can be involved in carrying out many of the different tasks related to these practical needs, but the **deacons** hold an office which is responsible to see to it that these things are being handled in an organized, effective and equitable way. They need to insure that all of the needs of all of the people and the congregation as a whole are being met without injustice, and in a very loving and humble way. Therefore, there arises a need for the requirement of these men to be qualified with the very highest moral and spiritual character.

It should also be pointed out that although this office of deacon is an official title and required ordination, that very nature of being a follower of Christ in the Christian church is that of service. We serve the Lord Jesus Christ and in so doing we serve one another. The entire church congregation is to be involved in loving and serving one another, and meeting one another's needs in various kinds of loving service to one another. But the deacons insure that the needs are being met

and are a model of loving service to the whole congregation, and not for the recognition of the title, but in humble service their Lord and Master, who bought them with His precious blood.

C. The Qualifications of Deacons

The need for these men to be qualified with both upright character and moral purity, is of such necessity that God saw fit to include these qualifications in detail in the Holy Scriptures. The passage in 1 Timothy 3:8-13, deals specifically with the qualifications of **deacons**. There we have a detailed account of what these requirements are to serve in the office of deacon. Here we shall take a brief but careful look at this passage.

1 Timothy 3:8-12 - 8 **Deacons likewise** must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, 9 but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. 11 Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. NASB

1 Timothy 3:8 - 8 Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, NASB

A. Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued – It is important to note the word “*likewise*” here. The deacons, just like the pastor-elders are to be tested and qualified. But “*likewise*” also implies that they are to be held to the same standard of spiritual character and moral purity as the pastor-elder. Even though they fill a somewhat different role than that of the pastor-elder, as official leaders in the church they are to be men of the utmost godly character. Here Paul says, “*men of dignity.*” Notice “*men*” and not women. They are to be “*men.*” This is plain and should not be overlooked. In verse 12 Paul says they are to “*be the husband of only one wife*” and this also is a plain statement of the fact that deacons are to be “*men.*” And here he describes them as “*men of dignity.*” This is to say they are honest men of integrity and serious upright character. “*Not double-tongued*” means they do not lie, they are men of truthful speech, not saying one thing to one person and the contrary to another, but rather always speaking the truth from their heart.

B. or addicted to much wine – Here he repeats a qualification also given to elders when he says not “*addicted to much wine.*” Here the Apostle does not forbid the drinking of wine, but the *excess* of it. The elder and deacon are not to be “*addicted to much wine*”, that is they do not use it in excess, and further this activity would *disqualify* them from serving as a deacon. They are to be sober men of self-control and not given to any behavior motivated by an *excess* of alcohol.

C. or fond of sordid gain – This is to say that he is trustworthy with money and finances with all integrity. He does not have an ungodly desire for money or obtaining it a way that is “*sordid*,” that is corrupt or impure. He is upright in his handling of finances and not given to seeking wealth by any other than honest and hard working means.

1 Timothy 3:9 - 9 but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. NASB

A. but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience – This is to say that he first knows and understands the Christian Faith in its mystery and glory. Here see the qualification that deacon must not be ignorant of the doctrines of the Christian Faith, but in fact know and understand them. The word “*faith*,” here, is synonymous with the Christian gospel; and the sense is, that he should hold firmly the great doctrines of the Christian religion, which had been so long concealed from men in a “*mystery*,” but which are now revealed through the glorious Gospel of Christ.

Ephesians 3:4-6 - 4 And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into **the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;** 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, NASB The deacon must know and understand the doctrine of God and of man, and also the incarnation of Christ and his atonement, and he must understand the doctrines of salvation and the Gospel. He not only knows them but he “*holds*” them. This is to say he takes his stand, “*holding*” and defending the “*faith*” firmly. He also holds the great doctrines of the “*faith*” with a “*clear conscience*.” This is to say his heart is pure in regard to his profession of faith. He not only believes in Christ and loves Him, but he obeys Him from a pure heart. His “*conscience*” is not condemning him but rather affirming that he does in fact trust Christ alone for his righteousness and that he does seek to obey Him with clean hands and a pure heart.

1 Timothy 3:10 - 10 And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. NASB

A. And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach – Here see the imperative nature of the testing process for officers in the church. They must “*first be tested*” and “*then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach*.” By tested here the Apostle means proved true according to these qualifications. In fact, these are the measuring line by which we measure the godly character of God servant leaders in His church. Only “*if*” they pass the testing, will they be allowed to serve in the office and title of deacon. But notice here they must be “*beyond reproach*.” This is to say that there

is no reproachable characteristics in their life which violate the standards of these qualifications. They are not open to the charge of a violation of any of these qualifications. They are to fully qualify according to these guidelines and in the matter of each qualification be “*beyond*” any “*reproach*” or violation thereof.

As a matter of practicality I would like to suggest that you start with a lengthy and thorough written questionnaire that tests them both in the qualifications of character but also in the basic knowledge of the Christian Faith. Then after a time of much prayer, contemplation and examination, upon successful completion of the testing process, then let them be ordained.

1 Timothy 3:11 - 11 Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. NASB

A. Women – Some say the translation here should be “*women*” and others say it should be “*wives*” as is the rendering in the Authorized and NKJV. Had the Apostle wanted to clearly express the idea of a deaconess he could have clearly done so by using the Greek word *diakonos* as he did in Romans 16 where he commends a woman in the church for her faithful service. But because the Apostle here denotes the official title and office of deacon in the church, he uses the Greek word *gune* which is properly rendered “*wives*.” This is clear from the context for several reasons. For example in verse 8 he says deacons must be “*men*,” this is clear not the slightest bit ambiguous. And in verse 12 he says they must be the “*husband of only one wife*.” Here in verse 11, he moves to a discussion of the deacon’s *family relations* and he starts with the character of their wives and moves progressively to a discussion about their children.

B. must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things – And so the deacon’s wives are to be “dignified,” like that of their husbands from verse 8, that is honest women of integrity and composed and upright character. And also they are not to be malicious gossips, that is, not liars or slanderers, the word is actually *diabolos* meaning devils. They are to be women of truthful speech as their husbands. Here also they are to be “*temperate*,” that is sober, having self control and not given to losing their temper or composure. They are also to be “*faithful in all things*”, that is, they are to be trustworthy and capable of handling their own affairs, diligent and responsible.

C. Let deacons be husbands of only one wife – The idea here is that at any given time in his life he is devoted to only one wife. That is never having more than one marriage partner at any one time, and never given to any kind of affair outside of his marriage covenant.

D. and good managers of their children and their own households – The deacon is to be one who is capable and responsible to handle all the affairs of his own house. He is to be diligent in overseeing its affairs so that he is a “*good*”

manager” of his children and his household. His command of his house should not be one of sternness, tyranny or severity, but one of loving care and nurture, with firm discipline and kind service. He is to be a wise manager of his own home and the fruit of this should be evident in his wife and children.

1 Timothy 3:13 - 13 For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. NASB

A. **For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus** – Here see what a high honor it is to hold this office in the Christian church whereby a man is said to “*obtain for themselves a high standing*” in the “*faith.*” This is to say they should be regarded highly by the church even as they are highly regarded by Christ for their faithful service. And not only this, but they gain a “*great confidence in the faith.*” That is the full assurance of the true knowledge of Christ, loving and serving Him with all diligence, which instills an amazing confidence in the hearts of those who eat the fruit of it. The diligent servant of God has in store for himself all of the promises of eternal life in Christ and an eternal inheritance laid up for him in heaven. With such hope do we press on to serve our Master and Lord, who has bought us with His own blood, and whom we serve with gladness of heart and mush gratitude. Indeed God has promised reward to those who serve him well and minister to His people.

Hebrews 6:10-12 - 10 For **God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.** 11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, 12 that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. NASB

May his name be glorified in all who seek to serve Him with pure hearts and lives.

D. Questions and Answers