

ECCLESIOLOGY
THE LOCAL CHURCH
 Lesson 15

Qualifications and Duties of Deacons

I. MAJOR PASSAGES I Timothy 3:8-13; Acts 6:1-7

II. THE MEANING OF DEACON (*diakonos*)

- A. The general connotation of deacon is one who serves or a servant with emphasis upon the obedient activity of the servant.
- B. Some think it is from the Greek word *dioko* which means to pursue, hence a runner, which indicates activity.
- C. Some think it comes from the Greek word *konis*, which means dust, indicating that the deacon should stir up dust by his busy activity.

III. THE ORIGIN OF THE OFFICE OF DEACON Acts 6:1-7

- A. While it can't be proven definitely, most commentators and church tradition take the position that the office of deacon in the local church begin in Acts 6. Objections: The major objection to this viewpoint is that the word "deacon" is nowhere applied to the seven men in Acts 6, nor does the word "deacon" occur at all in the Book of Acts.
- B. Objection Refuted
 - 1. In Phil. 1:1, the deacons are addressed with the elders (bishops). It is believed that Philippians was written about one year before Luke wrote the Book of Acts, and by this time the office of deacon was taken for granted. This is seen in the fact that Luke does not record the origination of the office of elder in the New Testament church, although the office of elder is mentioned many times in Acts. The origination of the office of elder was assumed, so also the office of deacon.
 - 2. Luke, the author of the Book of Acts, traveled with Paul and knew full well the form of government for the local church. Thus he would assume the office of deacon in Acts 6.
 - 3. Acts 6 does not name the office of deacon but it does describe the duties of the office using the corresponding verb *diskonein* (6:2) and the noun *diakonia* (6:1). These duties fit well with the qualifications for the office as found in 1 Tim. 3, namely the handling of money and gifts for the poor.
 - 4. If the choosing of the seven in Acts 6 was only temporary expediency, why narrate in detail its installation?
 - 5. Tradition supports the office of deacon in Acts 6. The office of deacon is spoken of by Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Ignatius and the Didache. These are fairly reliable history occurring before 150 AD.

IV. THE DUTIES OF A DEACON

- A. He serves in a temporal sphere so as to alleviate those in the teaching and preaching ministry, who serve in the spiritual sphere (Acts 6:1-3).
- B. It appears that he was one who cared for the sick, afflicted and destitute in the assembly (Acts 6:1-3 cf. 1 Tim. 5:9-16).
- C. CONCLUSION: The deacon has a temporal (physical) rather than a spiritual work. The duties of a deacon today would probably fall into the following categories:
 - 1. They would be in charge of all temporal (physical) aspects of the church such as the care and upkeep of the building, grounds, getting new building built, preparation for the Lord's Table and assisting in the administration of church monies under the direction and supervision of the elders.
POINT: Finances are both a spiritual and physical matter; therefore they should be under the control of the elders completely or should be the responsibility of the deacons under the direction and supervision of the elders.
 - 2. They would, when possible, visit the sick and afflicted.

V. DUTIES OF A DEACON AS COMPARED TO THAT OF AN ELDER

- A. The elders have a spiritual responsibility and the deacons have a physical or temporal responsibility.
- B. Deacons have no teaching duties but the elders must teach. The deacons do not have to teach, but they have to be spiritual men. POINT: However, if the Philip in Acts 6:5 is the same as the Philip in Acts 8:26, then it may be seen that a person can be both an evangelist and a deacon. Therefore, we conclude that a deacon is to use other gifts, even teaching, if he has them, but teaching and evangelistic gifts are not mandatory for the office of deacon.
- C. Deacons do not have any ruling capacity in the assembly but the elders must rule. NOTE: Nowhere in the New Testament does it ever indicate that deacons in the local church are a decision-making body. They are servers of the Lord, of the elders and of the congregation.
- D. The deacons are always the helpers of the elders. POINT: The office of deacon, while vitally important for the functioning of the local assembly, does not carry the same responsibility as that of the office of elder. **Elders cannot operate effectively in their sphere of ministry unless there are faithful deacons operating in their sphere of ministry.**

VI. QUALIFICATIONS FOR DEACON

- A. Acts 6:1-6
 - 1. They have to be men (6:2). The Greek word means males. At least in Acts 6 they were all men.
 - 2. They have to be Christians (6:3 - "among you"). No unsaved men are to have part in the government of the local church.
 - 3. They have to be spiritual men (6:3 - "full of the Holy Spirit"). They are to be controlled by the Holy Spirit and manifesting the fruit of the Spirit in

their lives - (Gal. 5:22-23). POINT: This was the normal, not unusual requirement for deacon. I

4. They have to be wise (6:3 - “full of wisdom”). They must have practical wisdom. This was probably wisdom that was needed in handling people: Practical “know-how” and administration.
 5. They were to have faith (6:5 - “full of faith”). This in context refers only to Stephen, but must also have reference to the other six men. Deacons are to have a practical faith that knows how to trust God in practical matters, especially in the area of finances.
- B. Tim. 3:8-13
1. They are to be grave (3:8 - “worthy of respect”). This word speaks of gravity and dignity, which involves seriousness of purpose and self-respect in conduct. Some think this refers to good-business practices and ethics in the secular world.
 2. They are to have a controlled tongue (3:8 - “sincere or not double-tongued”). They are not to be two-faced or to speak loosely about others. Being leaders in a local church the deacons will know a great deal about the lives of other Christians and they should keep quiet about what they know.
 3. They are not to drink much wine (3:8 - “not indulging in much wine”). Deacons are not to be addicted to wine or attached to it so that they are thinking about it all the time. If wine is used, it is to be done moderately and probably only as a basic food staple.
 4. They are not to love money (3:8 - “not pursuing dishonest gain”). The deacons administered the assemblies’ monies to the destitute, under the authority of the Apostles (elders), and the temptation would be great to steal from the treasury.
 5. They are to stand strong in the fundamentals of the Christian Faith (3:9 - “Keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience”). They are to express conscientious purity and sincerity concerning the Christian Faith, not just give intellectual assent to its teachings.
 6. They are to be proved (3:10 - “tested”): Potential candidates for the office of deacon should be observed for a good while before--given an office in the local church.
 7. They are to be blameless (3:10 - “nothing against them”). They are to be unaccuseable in that they are to have a reputable testimony among all in the assembly. They should not be a stumbling block to any other brother in Christ.
 8. They are to have reputable wives (3:11 - “In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything”). The wrong kind of wife would be a great hindrance to a deacon. She must be one who would not prattle and slander, concerning the way distribution was made, the attitudes of the recipients, and other things she would discover through her husband’s office. NOTE: This verse may refer to women deacons.

9. They are to have only one wife (3:12 - “husbands of but one wife”). This probably means one wife after having accepted Christ. Some take it to mean one wife in a lifetime. This qualification is open to interpretation. NOTE: However, any professing Christian who has been divorced (unless the innocent party) after receiving Christ cannot hold the office of deacon or elder.
10. They are to rule their homes well (3:12 - “must manage his children and his household well”). They are to be the spiritual leaders of their families, and their children are to be in subjection and obedient to the parents.

VII. METHOD FOR SELECTING A DEACON (Acts 6:3,5,7; 1 Tim. 3:10)

- A. The potential men for deacons are to be proven men (1 Tim. 3:10). They are to be tested so as to be approved by the people and the elders.
- B. The Apostles told the assembly at Jerusalem to look out among them for men qualified to be deacons (Acts 6:3). The Holy Spirit was directing in the assembly and preparing spiritual men to be deacons. It was the responsibility of the assembly to spot these qualified men. The Apostles directed the assembly at Jerusalem in the selection of deacons.
- C. The assembly in turn chose out those qualified men (Act 6:5). It is difficult to determine just how they chose these men out, whether it was general agreement or by a popular election. Here the multitude chose.
- D. The Apostles in turn appointed those that the assembly selected (Acts 6:3). This indicates that the Apostles had the final word on whether a man was qualified for the office of deacon.
- E. The Apostles then laid their hands on the deacons so as to identify them with the physical and temporal aspects of the ministry (Acts 6:6).
- F. CONCLUSION
 1. It appears that today the elders in a local assembly are the final authority in accepting or rejecting a deacon chosen by the people. This protects the ministry of the local assembly.
 2. The choice of deacons today could be by some form of vote by the people, popularity or prestige. POINT: Possibly the elders should nominate or select qualified men for the office of deacon and then bring these before the people for their approval or disapproval. Or the congregation elects a deacon and the elders approve him.
 3. No person should be hurt if he is not chosen to this office, realizing that at this time it is not God-s will for him to be a deacon.

VIII. NUMBER OF DEACONS

- A. The deacons when mentioned in Scripture are always a plurality.
- B. Many churches feel that the divine number is seven. However, the seven deacons were undoubtedly chosen to meet the needs of the congregation. Therefore the number would vary with the situation and need of a local assembly.

IX. TENURE OF OFFICE

- A. It appears that the office of deacon is for life, except for a lapse in doctrinal or moral behavior, which would cause expulsion.
- B. It would not be wrong to have a 2 or 3 year active term for a deacon. For practical purposes today, there can be active and inactive deacons, but one can ever lose the office and title of deacon.
- C. A person can move over to the office of elder from the diaconate but he would not lose his title of deacon, he just would no longer function as a deacon.

X. REWARDS OF THE OFFICE OF DEACON (I Tim. 3:13)

- A. Those who serve well gain an excellent standing (3:13a).
 - 1. The interpretation of this may refer to a man, who carries out his office of deacon well, has gained the respect of the elders, and is now in line for promotion from deacon to elder; he has moved to a higher rank.
 - 2. This might also mean a gaining of an excellent standing before men because of the past work of being a deacon. They will be highly respected men in the assembly.
- B. They gain great assurance in their faith (3:13b). A deacon with an assured position and blameless reputation in the church would have a great assurance of faith, displaying boldness of speech and a positive attitude in the Christian community and in the world.

XI. PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF CHOOSING DEACONS (Acts 6:1-7)

- A. The office of deacon arose out of a practical need in the assembly. The Apostles, administrators of spiritual things, needed help.
- B. It was the Grecian (Hellenistic Jews) that did the complaining, so qualified men from the Hellenistic Jews were selected as deacons to meet this problem. Notice that all the names of the seven deacons are Greek names. The best way to stop the complaining of these Hellenistic Jews was to put the responsibility back on them. NOTE: Some of the women (widows) in the church at Jerusalem felt neglected and began to complain and this in turn caused all the Hellenistic Jews to complain.
- C. The Word increased simply because the Apostles had more time for the spiritual aspects of the ministry. There was nothing mystical about this whole thing but it was using good common sense to solve a problem and the work of the Lord increased.

XI. POINTS TO PONDER

- A. The office of deacon is a Christ-given ministry and every person appointed to this position should realize the seriousness of it. **A position in Christ's government of the local church requires much responsibility.**
- B. A man may have the qualifications for elder and not the qualifications for deacon or visa versa.
- C. Most of the problems in a local assembly come, not-over doctrinal issues, but over practical, physical and temporal things. Thus the deacons, who are

chosen from among the people, should handle these problems under the guidance of the elders.

- D. It appears that a relatively young convert can hold the office of deacon if he meets the qualifications as set down in Scripture. NOTE: A young Christian could be a deacon because it is not a ruling or governing office.
- E. When going from deacon to elder or elder to deacon it is not stepping up or down in God's eyes, it is stepping over. NOTE: A person who is a deacon and shows eldership gifts should be able to move over become an elder at any time.
- F. Deacons are helpers of the elders and all policy actions of the deacons should be subject to the elders.