

Body Life - #4

The Qualifications and Duties of Elders and Deacons – Part Two

Introduction – As we examine 1 Timothy 3 it is quite clear that God takes the offices of elder and deacon very seriously. We saw that the qualifications for elder encompassed all aspects of a man's life. There are not many differences in the scope of requirements for deacons. Where there are differences, we are given clues as to the distinction of duties.

Office of Deacons (Acts 6:1-6) - *“...to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons”* (Phil 1:1). There is a distinct office called ‘deacon’. ‘Diakonos’ has been transliterated more than translated from the Greek. It generally can mean servant, or ‘one who waits tables’, or ‘one who supplies the needs of others’. It is used technically twice in the NT to describe a church office. This passage in Acts gives us insight into the purpose of the office.

“Now in those days...” (v1) – These were days of enormous growth (Acts 4:4) and there were many needs for those who were a part of the church. The widows of the Hellenists were being neglected (notice there already was a deacon-like service going on).

“...the word of God...” (v2) – There were real physical needs, but the apostles knew their calling was to the word of God – teaching and preaching (and prayer – v4) – and they were to give themselves to that with as little distraction as possible.

Assumed Responsibility – These verses show us that the church has a responsibility for the needs of widows. It can be argued by analogy that the church has a corporate responsibility for the ‘needy’ in the church, but it must never become an excuse for a ‘welfare mentality’ among the saints.

High Bar (v3) – This is why there is such a high standard for the qualifications of deacons. They must be men *‘full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom’*. Paul's letter to Timothy helps to flesh this out.

Qualifications of Deacons (1 Tim 3:8-13) – The elders have spiritual oversight of the flock and the deacons have delegated tasks from the elders particularly with regard to the physical needs of the body. This does not mean that we are not to care about the spiritual qualifications of these men. Quite the opposite.

“reverent, not double-tongued” – Reverent might be translated ‘worthy of respect’, pointing to what people think of him. Related to that, he is known as a man who keeps his word.

“not given to much wine, not greedy for money” – Like the elders, things do not consume this man nor have control over him.

“holding to the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience” – The deacons are not required to be able to teach, but this does not mean that they are not required to be men who know the scriptures well. And his conscience is pure because he is confident that he is living according to what he knows to be true and right.

Test Them (v10) – There is to be an established probationary period where the church can concur that the man is blameless in his qualifications and duties as a deacon.

The Deacon's Household (vv11-12) – As with the elders, the deacons are to be examined with an eye to their home-life.

Deacons' Wives – Why is a deacon's wife to be examined and why is the elder's wife not mentioned? The short answer is, Paul doesn't say. We can argue by analogy and with the strength of the ‘likewise’ in v11, that we should expect the wives of elders to be like the wives of deacons.

“reverent, not slanderers, temperate” – As their husbands, they are to be women who are worthy of respect, and not known for being malicious gossips, or ‘devils’. And to be ‘temperate’ is to be one who is restrained, self-controlled, and orderly.

“faithful in all things” – So with regard to her husband, she is content and delighted. She does not neglect her duties in the home for selfish ambitions because she knows what it is to be a wife. She is an example to the women of what it is to care for the body and be devoted to the word of God.

Godly Husband and Father (v12) – These qualifications parallel the same from the elder's list. A deacon must be faithful in his marriage, sexually pure, and a good father as defined by the Word.

The Duties of Deacons – Our Constitution states *“Under the general oversight of the Elders, the Deacons will manage the financial, physical, social, and benevolent functions of the church.”* This can be determined from our study of Acts 6 above, and from the general use of the term ‘diakonia’ elsewhere (i.e. Acts 11:29, 12:25, Matt 25:44)

Church Responsibility: Individual & Corporate – Those passages, however, are speaking of Christians generally and not to Deacons specifically. What are we to make of this?

- Elders are responsible for the church's physical needs, however...
- They should delegate the work of this to qualified men, while teaching the church generally of our requirement to ‘love one another’.
- The Deacons should provide biblical relief to those who are needy, while being an example to all of us as to how to be merciful.
- All of this requires that we know one another. This is the requirement of Body Life. Who are you serving today?