

State of the Church 2020 – Part 3

Qualifications and Duties of Deacons – Acts 6:1-7, 1 Tim 3:8-13

Introduction – We are concluding this series with instructions on a more mysterious office, at least as far as direct information from the Scriptures can be found. While we have explicit qualifications (much like the office of elder), an explicit job description is never given. We can turn to Acts 6, as well as the meaning and use of the word *diakonos*, for some indications. A study of the ministry of the diaconate in light of the ministry of the elders and the overall commission of the church makes clear that the work of the gospel through the Spirit-empowered church is to serve the whole man and, even greater, all of humanity. In a very real way, deacons serve the church in such a way as to display her as the hands and feet of Jesus to a lost and needy world.

Diakonos – The word is transliterated “*deacon*,” referring to this office in 1 Tim 3:8, 12 and Phil 1:1. But the word shows up many more times in the New Testament. They are the king’s *servants* in the Parable of the Marriage Feast (Matt 22:13), and they are the *servants* addressed by Mary when Jesus turns the water into wine (John 2:9). Jesus tells us that the greatest among us will be our *servant* (*diakonos* - Matt 23:11). It is often translated *minister*. Paul is a *deacon* of the gospel (Col 1:23) and Timothy is a *deacon* of God (1 Thess 3:2). We learned that Jesus is our Chief Elder (1 Pet 5:4); He is also the Chief *Deacon* to the circumcision (Rom 15:8). What we learn from these non-office uses of the word is that the word denotes one who serves, waits upon others, and administers and bestows on behalf of other authorities.

Deacons and the Growth and Care for the Church (Acts 6:1-7) – During the early days following Pentecost, the church multiplied “*to many thousands*” (Matthew Henry), and there arose a complaint. Many Greek-speaking Jews had come to faith, but their widows were not being cared for in the daily *diakonia* (v1). The apostles, serving as the elders of this new, fast-growing church knew they must not leave “*the word of God*,” for they needed to be fed in this way as well (v2). And so, they turned to the disciples and asked them to nominate men to care for these needs (v3). They would be serving in the name of Jesus and on behalf of the church and so it was critical that they be men “*of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom*.” Then, the apostles would be able to give themselves to prayer and to the *diakonia* of the word (v4). The people chose and the apostles laid hands on them. The result of this careful obedience appears to be that “*the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith*” (v7).

Ministers to the Needs and to the Needy – The deacons then, ministered in two directions. First, they served the teachers of the Word by receiving a delegated task from them and administering that responsibility on their behalf. Second, they ministered to the needy in the midst of the congregation. The church is to provide spiritual food but it is not to neglect the physical needs of those in their midst (James 2:13-17).

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, though they may be called upon to minister the Word as they serve in their office (consider the testimony of Stephen in Acts 6:8ff or Philip in 8:26ff). 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.

Their Wives – The word (*gune*) is translated both as *woman* and *wife* throughout the New Testament and so the decision has to be made contextually. Paul is certainly not talking about women generally here, nor does he appear to be speaking of deaconesses alone, especially since v12 addresses “*deacons*” as needing to be “*husbands of one wife*” (like the elders) as well as the fact that an office or order of widows is established in 5:9-12. This leads to a conclusion that he is speaking of the wives of deacons (who may or may not be serving alongside their husbands).

The qualifications run parallel with the first four things mentioned about the deacons (v8). 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. She is to be *faithful* (to her Lord and to her husband) in all things.

A 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.

Duties of Deacons – With consideration to all the passages mentioned above, our Constitution states “*Under the general oversight of the Elders, the Deacons will manage the financial, physical, social, and benevolent functions of the church.*”

To the Church and Beyond – The two offices of elder and deacon are separate but complementary (Acts 6:2-3). The shepherd-elders must give their primary attention to teaching the Word to the people and to prayer. Likewise, the deacons must give their primary attention to caring for the physical needs of the body. And both offices must work together to bring the Word and ministry of Jesus to the local community around us as well. We should pray for and anticipate God's blessing through this where “*the number of disciples multiplied greatly*” (Acts 6:7).

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