
DEACON ORDINATION

DEACONS AMONG THE CHURCH

ACTS 6:1-7

6:1 Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. 2 And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. 3 Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5 And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. 6 These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

7 And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

INTRODUCTION

In our culture today, serving others is only popular if one can actually do little of it and be largely recognized for it. "Servant-leadership" may be a popular phrase in some circles, but many more people want only the "leadership" part of that model, and they are quite unwilling to be committed to the "servant" part. In the local church, God has established two offices – the Elders/Pastors and the Deacons. Deacons are individuals named for the task of service, and these are meant to be godly examples of just this kind of person. All true Christians are servants of Christ and others, but deacons act as exemplary servants, and the benefits are enormous.

MESSAGE OUTLINE:

(1) WHAT IS A DEACON?

(2) WHAT DOES A DEACON DO?

(3) SIX PRACTICAL BENEFITS OF A BIBLICALLY ORDERED CHURCH

(1) WHAT IS A DEACON?¹

“2 And the twelve [the number of apostles/elders at that time] *summoned the full number of the disciples* [the local church] *and said, ‘It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables* [not that the men were above the task, but the task of preaching God’s Word was not to be neglected by those skilled and commissioned to it]. **3 Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty...”**”

◆ DIVISION OF LABOR² - APOSTLES/ELDERS/PASTORS AND DEACONS

1. Apostles/Elders/Pastors

- “Preach the Word of God” (v3) & “Ministry of the Word” (v4)
 - As a matter of fact, this is the only significant difference between elders/pastors/overseers and deacons.
 - An elder/overseer/pastor must be “able to teach” or “able to give instruction in sound doctrine and rebuke those who contradict it” (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9)
 - Paul says to Timothy [an elder a local church], “I charge you... **preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching...**” (2 Tim. 4:2).
- “Prayer” (v4)
 - Paul wrote to the church (the Christians) in Colossae, “**We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you... And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord...**” (Col. 1:3, 9–10).

¹See Tabb’s note on this question: “DEACON (διάκονος, diakonos, “servant”). One who serves in an official capacity in the church as a deacon (compare Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8–13; possibly Rom 16:1). The office of deacon may parallel the role of the assistant (חָזָן, chazzan) of the synagogue (Burtchaell, From Synagogue to Church, 317–21; compare Mishnah, Sukkah 4:4; Sotah 7:7).”

²See Tabb’s note on the division of labor: “There are two primary classes of church leadership offices in the New Testament: that of the overseer and elder, and that of the deacon (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:1–13). Deacons do not hold teaching or ruling authority in the church but exercise responsibility for the physical needs of the congregation. The complementary service of overseers and deacons is analogous to that of the apostles and the Seven in Acts 6:1–6.”

2. Deacons

- Deacons, then, are men who serve in various logistic capacities in order to free the elders/pastors of a congregation to devote themselves to “ministry of the Word of God” and “prayer” for the congregation.
- The Deacons are not just any man who is skilled in finances, gardening, building maintenance, or bedside manner; they are, first and foremost, *qualified* men.

◆ QUALIFIED MEN (ACTS 6:3)

*“brothers, **pick out** from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom”*

1. Honorable

- Deacons are to be men who have a “good reputation” for virtue among the church family and the general community.

2. Spirit-filled

- Deacons are to be men who have been “born again” (John 3:3) by the Spirit of God, and they are to be men who exemplify what it looks like to be “filled” or “controlled” by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:15-21).

3. Wise

- Deacons are to be men who have an intimate knowledge of and experience with Christ Himself (Col. 2:1-4). A man who only has a string of life experience or merely theoretical knowledge may actually be swayed quite easily; but a man who is grounded in Christ’s Word and has experienced the real life application of it will be steady like no other.

◆ QUALIFIED MEN (1 TIMOTHY 3:8-13)³

*“8 Deacons likewise must be **dignified**, not double-tongued, **not addicted to much wine**, **not greedy for dishonest gain**. 9 They must **hold the mystery of the faith** with a clear conscience. 10 And let them also be **tested** first; then let them serve as deacons if they **prove themselves blameless**. 11 Their **wives** likewise must be **dignified**, **not slanderers**, but **sober-minded**, **faithful** in all things. 12 Let deacons each be **the husband of one wife**, **managing their children** and their own **households well**. 13 For those who serve well as deacons gain a **good standing for themselves** and also **great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus**.”*

³See Tabb’s commentary on this passage under “Further Discussion”

1. **Dignified** (v8): Closely related to the term 'respectable' (v2), this refers to something that is honorable or worthy.
 - A deacon must be a man worthy of respect.
2. **Honest** (v8): The phrase in the passage is 'not double-tongued,' and this refers to the expression of insincerity and dishonesty.
 - A deacon must be trustworthy and credible.
3. **Sober** (v8): While sobriety is a fitting description in all of its various meanings, the specific qualification here refers to the necessity that a deacon be free from addiction to strong drink. Though the passage does not address it specifically, any mind-altering substance may be reasonably included.
 - A deacon must be self-controlled and sober.
4. **Financially Temperate** (v8): The phrase in the passage does not refer to a person's financial status, and neither does this qualification. This qualification deals with a man's attitude towards material wealth, neither being a lover nor pursuer of money.
 - A deacon should be content, self-controlled, and moderate, regardless of his economic status.
5. **Sound in Faith and Life** (v9): The statement in the passage is twofold. First, the content of his belief or faith must match that of the Scriptures. The Gospel he believes and proclaims is the Gospel he has received from the Bible. Second, the practice of his life must match the content of his faith. The life he lives is marked by loving submission to Christ, his Savior and Lord.
 - A deacon "must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience."
6. **Proven and blameless** (v10): All humanity is born with a predisposition towards sin and not away from it (Rom. 3:9-20; Eph. 2:1-3), and, therefore, all men are not blameless in the perfect and literal sense. This qualification refers not to one's personal righteousness before God, but to one's practical reputation among men. Such a reputation must also be measurable and demonstrated over time.
 - A deacon must have a proven track record of dependable godly living.
7. **Godly wife** (v11): According to Paul, a deacon's wife must "be dignified, not [a] slanderer, but sober-minded, faithful in all things" (v. 11). This

qualification is indicative of the fundamental nature of a marital relationship. It is not enough that a man be godly (if he is married), so his wife should be godly as well. She must exhibit godliness in similar ways as her husband, being respectable or dignified, not a slanderer or gossip, sober-minded or temperate, and generally faithful or above reproach.

- A deacon, if he is married, must enjoy relationship with a godly wife, whose credentials complement his own.

8. **Faithful husband** (v12): The phrase “one-woman man” has been understood to mean various things by various people. The best understanding of this generalized expression is that it refers to the faithfulness of a husband toward his wife. Furthermore, it is wise to add nothing to the explicit or implicit biblical imperatives. Therefore, a man’s current example and some history of marital fidelity are of greatest interest here, rather than the absence of divorce or the lack of multiple marriages over time.

- A deacon, if he is married, must be a faithful husband to his wife.

9. **Godly household** (v12): No man can ensure the salvation of his children, nor is any family free from any remnant of sinful expression. A father can, however, lead his family well and make a strong spiritual presence felt among his household. The results of such investments will be evident, and so will the lack of them.

- A deacon, if he is married and has children, must demonstrate himself to be a godly leader by the evidence of the godliness in his own home.

(2) WHAT DOES A DEACON DO?

*“Therefore, brothers, **pick out** from among you seven men of **good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty...***”

What “**duty**”?

The duty of “**servicing tables**” (v2).

◆ DEACONS SERVE

- διάκονος, *diakonos*, “servant”
 - This “job description” is both wide and narrow.

- Wide
 - Deacons may be assigned to virtually any task that is deemed by the local church to be necessary for the overall goal of “**making disciples**” (Matt. 28:18-20).
 - There are many tasks that accompany the organization of people (and those tasks grow as the number of people do).
 - Some tasks that have been traditionally assigned to deacons are:
 - Benevolence – (serving and financial assistance) needy church members, widows, single mothers, etc.
 - Finances – collecting and counting funds, keeping records, administrating accounts according to budget
 - Facilities – manage church property, prepare facilities for services, clean and/or close facilities, operate A/V
 - Ushers – greet and seat guests and members, distribute bulletins, prepare and serve communion elements

- Narrow
 - Deacons serve according to the **mission and strategy of the local church**.
 - The local church should never be distracted away from the ***most important things*** by merely ***good things***
 - Deacons serve so as to free up the pastors/elders for teaching, preaching, prayer, and general ministry of the Word of God

◆ DEACONS BENEFIT FROM THEIR SERVICE

*“For those who serve well as deacons gain a **good standing for themselves** and also **great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.**” (1 Tim. 3:13).*

- **They Earn “Good Standing”**

*“those who serve well as deacons gain a **good standing for themselves**”*

- While this sort of language may seem striking at the moment, let us remember that a local church is to be a very encouraging place for those who are in pursuit of Christ.
 - Paul says in Romans 12, “Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. **Outdo one another in showing honor**” (Rom. 12:9–10).
 - How might we love, honor, and hold fast to what is good in the men who serve as deacons among us?
 - We may thank these men for living lives that are consistent with the Gospel among us.
 - We may celebrate God’s work in them.
 - We may hold these men up as examples for others to follow.
 - Paul (demonstrating the kind of example Christians should be to one another) said to his disciple, Timothy, “You, however, have **followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness...** (2 Tim. 3:10).

- **They Earn “Great Confidence in Christ”**

“those who serve well as deacons gain a ...great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus”

- This is also striking, but also no surprise once we think about it.
 - The deacon who serves well will grow in his confidence in Christ.
 - As one serves Christ and others, inevitably trying times will come. As Christ proves a faithful friend and loving Lord again and again, the servant of Christ will increasingly be assured of Christ’s trustworthiness and sufficiency.
 - The author of Hebrews encourages his congregation, “**32 Recall the former days when, after you were enlightened [born again], you endured a hard struggle with sufferings... 35 Therefore do not throw away your confidence,**

which has a great reward. 36 For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised” (Heb. 10:35–36).

(3) SIX PRACTICAL BENEFITS OF A BIBLICALLY ORDERED CHURCH?

1. ELDERS/PASTORS PREACH BETTER

- Preaching is one of the primary roles of a pastor/elder, and preaching well takes much time and effort.

2. ELDERS/PASTORS PRAY MORE FREQUENTLY AND LONGER

- While pastors may always have congregants on their mind, intentionally setting aside time to pray for them is often neglected for the sake of tending to administrative responsibilities.

3. DEACONS SERVE

- Godly and gifted men put their gifts into practice. This includes innumerable benefits in itself.

4. DEACONS ARE EXEMPLARY SERVANTS

- Neither elders/pastors nor deacons are “first-class” Christians, in the sense that they are more Christian than another. There are at least two things, however, that we should remember here.
 - One, deacons are men who have demonstrated themselves to be Christians who are generally prevailing in the Christian life.
 - They believe the Gospel; they live as godly men; they put Christians disciplines into practice; and they submit themselves to Christ.
 - Two, every Christian is not going to be exemplary in this way, but every Christian should be following this example.
 - Exemplary deacons do not give “second-class” Christians a pass on these things mentioned above. Rather, non-deacon Christians should look to the examples and strive towards the prize.

5. THE CHURCH ENJOYS PEACE AND UNITY

- When each person contributes appropriately to the overall task (make disciples), then there is no strife between ministries, no power-plays for leadership, and no personal agendas.

6. THE CHURCH ENJOYS PRACTICAL EXAMPLES OF GODLY GROWTH AND SERVICE

- The office of Deacon, unlike Elder/Pastor, is not vocational office. Deacons serve Christ and others from the same life-circumstances as every other congregant.
 - In fact, our deacons consist of 1 insurance broker, 1 ice cream delivery man, 2 machinists, a handful of contractors, some engineers, a few job foremen for various kinds of projects and industries, and a financial consultant/manager.
 - Some of these men are retired (though Duck is managing to come out of retirement for a while), some are empty-nesters, some are still fathering their children at home, some are involved in various areas in the community (Eddie is more essential to NDISD than the mascot), and ALL of these men serve Christ and the congregation of FBC Diana.
 - All of these men are burdened with care for families placed on their Family Ministry Roster.
 - During Church activities, these men serve in Kid's ministry, LG leaders, Youth Group "bouncers," Choir voices, and Ushers/Greeters.
 - Throughout the week, these men:
 - landscape the yards of other church members who could use the help
 - build all kinds of things to help church members around their house
 - fix all kinds of handyman type problems for many people
 - show up at all hours at the hospital when some of you are in need of a warm, trusted, and godly face
 - give out of their own pockets to help various church members and others make it through
 - provide a confidential ear for many of you to voice personal problems and concerns
 - On a more personal note, these men provide examples of how to honor Christ by patiently and faithfully serving this local congregation under the leadership of a young and new pastor.

MY PRAYERS

- May God help us to be a biblically ordered church
- May God bless the men who serve as deacons among us
- May God raise us all up in holiness and faithfulness as we look to the examples of our deacons

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FURTHER DISCUSSION

The Office of Deacon: Character by Dan Dumas

<http://www.sbts.edu/blogs/2015/03/13/the-office-of-deacon-character/>

A Deacon on a Deacon's Reward by John Ingold

<https://9marks.org/article/deacon-deacons-reward/>

An Improper Deacon Ministry May Stunt Church Growth by Dwayne Hastings

<http://www.sbclife.net/Articles/1995/12/sla8>

Deacons: Shock Absorbers and Servants by Jamie Dunlop

<https://9marks.org/article/deacons-shock-absorbers-and-servants/>

The Biblical Qualifications and Responsibilities of Deacons by Benjamin Merkle

<https://9marks.org/article/biblical-qualifications-and-responsibilities-deacons/>

Must Deacons only be Males? (*Below is Tabb's notes on this question*)

Deaconesses or Deacons' Wives? The question of whether the New Testament office of deacon includes women is debated, primarily on the basis of 1 Tim 3:11, where Paul interrupts his discussion of deacons (διάκονοι, diakonoi; in 1 Tim 3:8, 12) to address the qualities of wives or women (γυναῖκας, gynaikas). Some understand 1 Timothy 3:11 to refer to the wives of deacons (compare ESV, NET, NIV [1978], NLT, KJV, HCSB), while others translate γυναῖκας (gynaikas) as “women” (NASB, NRSV, NJB) or “the women” (TNIV, NIV [2011]), referring to women serving as deacons.

The strongest arguments for interpreting γυναῖκας (gynaikas) as a reference to the wives of deacons are as follows:

1. The term γυνή (gynē) clearly refers to a deacon's wife in the next verse (1 Tim 3:12; compare 1 Tim 3:2).
2. Deacons are discussed in 1 Tim 3:8–10 and in 1 Tim 3:12–13, so a shift in topic without a textual clue in verse 12 is awkward (compare Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 202–5; Strauch, *Deacon*, 112–31).
3. In 1 Timothy 2:12, Paul does not permit women to exercise authority over a man, which some take to mean that women should not hold formal church office (compare Merkle, *40 Questions*, 256).
4. The Seven in Acts 6:1–6 are all men, which gives precedent for limiting the more developed role of deacon to men only.

The following arguments support the interpretation that γυναῖκας (gynaikas) in 1 Tim 3:11 refers to female deacons:

1. It is surprising that Paul would give qualifications for the wives of deacons but not of overseers in 1 Tim 3.
2. The adverb ὡσαύτως (hōsautōs, “likewise”) in 1 Tim 3:11 likely introduces a distinct yet similar group to the deacons in 1 Tim 3:8–10, given the previous usage of the term in 1 Tim 2:9; 3:8.
3. The list of qualifications for the γυναῖκας (gynaikas) in 1 Tim 3:11 finds lexical or thematic parallels in the lists for overseers and deacons in 1 Tim 3:1–10 (compare Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 492–4).
4. The original Greek text lacks a qualifier such as “their,” which is added by some translations (compare ESV, NET).
5. The restrictions of 1 Tim 2:12 do not apply to women serving as deacons, so long as their service is focused on meeting practical needs and does not include duties such as teaching men that are reserved for elders or

overseers (1 Tim 3:2; compare Köstenberger, “Pastorals,” 529; Stiefel, “Women Deacons,” 456).

In the New Testament, the office of overseer or elder in the early church is reserved for men who are charged with ruling and teaching authority (1 Tim 2:12; 3:2; 5:17), while men and women could serve as deacons (διακονέω, diakoneō; 1 Tim 3:12–13) to attend to practical needs in the congregation (compare Phoebe in Rom 16:1; Schreiner, Romans, 786–87). The New Testament is not explicit or comprehensive regarding the types of service that deacons engaged in. However, deacons likely were entrusted with church finances (compare 1 Tim 3:8) and served the church by attending to those in need, such as the widows (compare 1 Tim 5:3–16; Acts 6:1).

Tabb’s Commentary on 1 Timothy 3:8-13:

The New Testament focuses more on the character than the duties of deacons, who are to be persons worthy of respect in their speech, use of alcohol, handling of finances, marriages, and management of their homes. In 1 Timothy 3, “Paul is concerned that the right type of person be appointed to leadership” (Mounce, Pastoral Epistles, 159). The descriptions of overseers (1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:7–9) and deacons (1 Tim 3:8–13) are quite similar, which suggests that the difference in these offices does not concern character but gifting and calling (Merkle, 40 Questions, 233). In 1 Timothy 3:8–13, Paul lists seven qualifications for male deacons and four qualifications for the women. According to 1 Timothy 3:8, 11, deacons should be σεμνός (semnos)—“dignified” (ESV) or “worthy of respect” (NIV).

They must not be characterized by double-tongued speech, addiction to wine, or greed for gain (1 Tim 3:8; compare Titus 1:7; reiterated by Polycarp, To the Philippians 5:2). The latter quality carries a polemical thrust in light of the situation in the Ephesian church (compare 1 Tim 6:5–10). Deacons must hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience (1 Tim 3:9), which again contrasts with the false teachers (compare 1 Tim 1:19). Some have understood this requirement to imply that deacons were expected to assist the overseers in teaching the faith (compare Stott, 1 Timothy, 100; Marshall, Pastoral Epistles, 485–7), but this goes beyond the New Testament evidence (compare Clarke, Pauline Theology, 69 n. 115). According to Carson, “Deacons were responsible to serve the church in a variety of subsidiary roles, but enjoyed no church-recognized teaching authority akin to that of elders” (Carson, “Church,” 229). The women, similarly, are to be “faithful (πιστάς, pistas) in everything” (1 Tim 3:11).

Male deacons, like overseers, are to be “men of one woman (μῖς γυναικὸς ἄνδρες, *mias gynaikos andres*),” which likely stresses the need for “marital and sexual fidelity” from the time of conversion (Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 159; compare 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6). They should be good managers (προϊστάμενοι, *proistamenoï*) of their children and their own households, which are proving grounds for leadership in the “household of God,” the church (1 Tim 3:15). These qualifications do not require that a deacon be married or have children (compare 1 Cor 7:7–8), but if he does have a wife and family, his conduct toward them should be exemplary (compare Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 158–59). Candidates for the office of deacon are to be tested, and they should serve if they are “beyond reproach” (ἀνέγκλητος, *anenklētos*; 1 Tim 3:10). Those who serve well gain good standing and great confidence in the faith (1 Tim 3:13).