

Establishing a Deacon Ministry



Community Bible Church

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Introduction

The Bible speaks of only two offices of leadership within the church today. These are the elder and the deacon. To understand what God expects of a deacon, we must first turn to the Scriptures and find out how the biblical word “deacon” is used. No one should assume that he knows what a deacon is or does until he has thoroughly searched the Word of God to see what the Lord has to say on the matter.

The Greek word for deacon is diakonos *dee-ak-on-os*. It is found in the Bible 29 times and is translated servant, serve, deacon or minister. The term means: to be a servant, attendant, to wait upon (ie - a table waiter), and to execute the commands of another. These words are descriptive for the ministry that every believer should strive for within the body of Christ. While not every believer is called to the role of an elder we are all called to be servants thus we should all be pursuing these character traits in our lives.

Origin of the Deacon

Jethro counseled Moses to choose able men (servants) - such as fear God, men of truth and hating covetousness (Exodus 18:13-27). God told Moses to gather 70 men and He would put the Spirit upon them (Numbers 11:16). The Apostles told the brethren to choose out from among themselves seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom whom they could appoint to the duty of caring for the needs of the widows (Acts 6:3-8). While it is not conclusive that the men in Acts 6 represent “deacons” officially they certainly do perform the work of deacons, namely serving, and were probably the prototype of the office.

The Holy Spirit later gave rise to the formal position of deacon in the New Testament church. In Philippians 1:1 Paul says - “Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the pastors and deacons.”

Qualifications of a Deacon

The office of a deacon is very interesting; because nowhere in Scripture do we find a

“deacon board.” The deacons were not a ruling committee, an authority structure or a board of directors but rather a service group devoted to meeting the needs in the body. The modern idea of a group of deacons that lead the church and have authority over the elder/s is not found in the Scripture.

Before a man could be considered as a deacon, he must display the servanthood characteristics associated with the biblical meaning of the office. Is this man serving others rather than himself? Is he helping those in need? Is he calling on those that need encouragement? Is he encouraging the leadership? Is he willing to do the most menial tasks in the church for the benefit of the body?

The deacons only have one basic duty, responsibility or job; which is to execute the church policies, ministries and service related tasks that have been established by the elders. However, in order for deacons to do this particular duty; they had to meet the following qualifications in order to be appointed. It is amazing the Lord had such high standards to wait on tables in His church. It shows how seriously the Lord takes the caring of His blood bought bride.

The Apostles recognizing their proper priorities in "the ministry of the Word of God and prayer" (v.4) mention three qualifications for the deacons in Acts 6:

- To be full of the Spirit
- To be full of Wisdom
- To be known of good report (reputation)

These traits were visible and demonstrable. This was not the selection of “popular” men but rather that of godly men. The first men selected were assumed to be: Stephen, Phillip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicholas.

Later as Paul continued to plant and encourage churches throughout his ministry, he gave Timothy the responsibility to appoint leaders in the local congregations. According to 1 Timothy 3:8-13 these qualifications were listed for deacons:

- Must be dignified (serious)
- Not double-tongued (malicious talkers)
- Not given to much wine (drunk)
- Not greedy of financial gain (love of money)
- Holding the mystery of the faith in pure conscience (not to pursue dishonest gain)
- Be proved (must be tested)
- Found blameless (trustworthy, respected)
- Husbands of one wife
- Ruling his children and household well
- Temperate (clearly focused)

These qualities reflected maturity in Jesus Christ and integrity of character in following Him. Women should also serve as deacons and have some additional requirements. Rom 16:1; “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a **servant** of the church at Cenchreae.” Paul mentioned four qualifications for women using the Greek word *gunaikas* (1 Timothy 3:11). Women deacon qualifications are those of men deacons and also these four:

1 Timothy 3:11

- Worthy of respect
- Not malicious talkers - Titus 2:3a/b
- Reverent in the way they live
- Not to be slanderers

These qualifications hold true for women who serve in any capacity of church leadership. Also, in Titus 2:3-8 there are repeated qualifications found pertaining to both men and women who serve in the church.

The qualifications listed above for both men and women deacons are required and essential in order to have a biblical structure of leadership. Deacons must also be members of the church in good standing, live a proper life and be in worship and fellowship with the rest of the local church. Since their job is to serve they must be available and willing to be called upon when needs arise.

Appointment

The assembly of the church did the initial choosing of the deacons and the apostles performed the actual appointment to the office. This depicted unity and harmony between spiritual leaders and members of the flock. The deacons' main task was to take care of the practical/material needs and thus relieve the apostles for their main assignment of spiritual ministry. Today, the deacons are invaluable as they assist the elders in many areas of service to the church. As you have noticed the only distinct difference in the qualifications between the deacon and the elder is the requirement for the elder to be “apt to teach.” We find that using the following designation is very helpful in understanding how these roles differ. The elder’s office has do with maturity and oversight while the deacon has to do with ministry and service. The elder’s role is to pray, study, teach, equip and give oversight. The deacon’s role is primarily to serve the practical needs of the flock. Elder = maturity and deacon = ministry.

The Work of Deacons

The works that the Deacons perform are specific as well as collateral duties directed by the elders to fulfill the mission of the church. There are not usually a specific number of deacons chosen to serve the body nor are there any terms of office. In other words one is not a deacon for a one year term and then goes back to being a “regular” member of the church when their term is up. This is not a political office, rather a spiritual one, thus it does not come from man but from God. Deacons must be disciplined to maintain the Biblical qualifications of Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3 so they are not disqualified from the office.

The deacon ministry is broad as well as specific in nature. A great responsibility that

falls on deacons is that of helping the elders care for the flock. This requires men and women to be capable of working well with others, to be highly adaptive, flexible, thick skinned, well versed in the Word of God, understand the fragility of human beings and above all faithful, available and teachable. Deacons bring several benefits to the church by strengthening the foundation for service, supporting the elders in church leadership and keeping the church unified. Deacon work requires special training to keep the entire church body spiritually maturing, emotionally healthy, physically growing and materially maintained.

Elder Expectations of Deacons

The elders require that the deacons lead the people through inspired participation rather than delegated authority. Elders have several expectations of the deacons so they can concentrate on feeding the flock. Some of these expectations are listed below:

- The elders expect the deacons to give them love and support and pray for them and the church on a regular basis.
- The elders expect the deacons to participate in the church ministries.
- The elders expect the deacons under all circumstances to be loving, kind, patient and considerate of the congregation.

Elders depend on the deacons as servant ministers and servant leaders who set positive and spiritual examples for the congregation. Both elders and deacons are partners for the Lord and servants of His church. They both work together for the Glory of God, the good of His children and the advancement of His Kingdom. All ministries work under the leadership of the Lord.

Deacon and Family Ministry Connection

The quality of one's family life is related to the quality of their Christian relationships. The deacons are to take care of the physical needs of each member of the church. Each family in the church has issues, needs and burdens. The deacon ministry is instrumental in lessening the frailties and pain of the congregation. This is why it is paramount for families to be assigned to deacons and deacons be assigned to families. Deacons are obligated to care for church families

and are responsible to give expressions of love, attention to people's feelings and consistent support in helping families overcome and thrive.

Summary

The Elder/Overseer and Deacons are the two officers of church leadership. The congregation looks to these leaders to serve as teachers, coaches and models in the quality of Christian living that God expects and commands.

Specifically; deacons serve as models in four critical leadership characteristics. Deacons must display and demonstrate: mature Christian faith, a life accepted and assigned by God and His church, consistent Christian family living and personal and public morality. Biblical qualifications for deacons include growth experiences in God's presence, understanding God's perspectives and being assured in God's promises. Churches turn to deacons in the caring for the needs of its membership.

Serving God's people is definitely a calling. God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies those He calls. Every leader must, especially, the elders and deacons, have a sense of divine purpose. This divine purpose is one of spiritual healing, caring, listening and compassion. Deacons are set apart to serve and to be committed to God for the building of His Kingdom. The office of the Deacon is not one of authority, but of acceptance, alignment, attending, assurance, attracting and attaching people with clarity and mission.

The deacon ministry is one of reconciliation, resilience and recourse - a peace maker, a builder of Christian harmony that brings about spiritual fellowship and interpersonal responsive relationships. If the Lord is calling you to this vital role in His church then we wish to welcome you to those whose joy it is to serve His flock