

# THE MINISTRY OF DEACONS

## INTRODUCTION

If you want to grow effectively and solidly in the Christian life, **don't be MAN-CENTERED** in your pursuit of spirituality (**concerned only about the things that benefits you personally, self-help**). **Be GOD-CENTERED** (focused on God and how He operates in His church and in personal life).

How many of you heard the term DEACON before coming to EEF? How many of you have heard a sermon on DEACONS?

What does the Holy Bible speak about the deacons? **Why should the church know this doctrine?** [In the appointment of deacons, you will observe your significant role as member of Christ's body]

**Remember**, the church cannot function effectively without the ministry of deacons.

**Matt Smethurst, *Deacons***: A congregation without biblically functioning deacons is impoverished, but a congregation with them is incalculably rich.

## 1. WHO ARE THE DEACONS?

The Greek word for "Deacon" is "**diakonos.**" (διδάσκων) It means "**servant**". They are responsible for the practical acts of service in the local church.

- The Greek term is used **twenty-nine times** in the New Testament.

A. Deacon is used mostly for **ordinary service for the welfare of people**:

- ❖ **Mark 10:45**, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but **to serve [deacon]**, and to give his life as a ransom for many." CHRIST IS THE GREATEST DEACON, A MODEL FOR DEACONING.
- ❖ **Mark 9:35**, And [Jesus] said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and **servant [deacon]** of all."

❖ **1 Peter 4:10**, As each has received a gift, use it to **serve [deacon] one another**, as good stewards of God's varied grace:

**Note:** All Christians in general must be a servant of all, serving unselfishly for the welfare of others. **You cannot have Christ as your Lord if you are not a servant of people.**

**Alexander Strauch, *Paul's Vision for the Deacons*:** A church must make a **distinction** between **all** who serve the church and **some** who serve in the church as official, qualified, *diakonoi*.

B. Bible scholars assume that three- or four-times Deacon is used to refer to the **official ministry in the church**.

- i. **1 Timothy 3:1-7** speaks about the **qualification of elders**. **1 Timothy 3:8-13** speaks about the **qualification of deacons (Deacons likewise...)**.
- ii. **In Philippians 1:1**, Paul writes in his opening greetings, "To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and **deacons**."

**From the above Scriptures, we learn:**

- i. The early local churches had **two offices**: elders and deacons.
- ii. Elders and deacons are **part of a particular local church** and **exercise their God-given responsibilities** in their local church.  
**Note:** None should be proposed for eldership or deaconate without first evidencing their membership and commitment to the local church.
- iii. Elders are **distinct** from the deacons [in their responsibilities]
- iv. Elders and deacons are **distinct** from the believers [in their responsibilities].
- v. Elders and deacons are both in **the plural form** (more than one elder and deacon).
- vi. Elders and deacons must be biblically qualified to take their offices.

## 2. WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES/FUNCTIONS OF DEACONS IN THE CHURCH?

**Note:** We do not have detailed information about the role of deacons in the church. Their qualification is mentioned but not particularly their function.

**Thomas Constable, *expository preacher*:** Paul said nothing about the duties of deacons. This indicates that he did not associate specific tasks with the office. He seems to have intended that deacons should function as official servants of the church in whatever capacity the elders may see a need for this. They were in effect the elders' assistants.

However, there are some clues through which we can understand their role:

- ❖ **Acts 6:1-7**, 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. 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. 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. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 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. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.
- ❖ **Romans 16:1-2**, "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a **servant [deacon]** of the church at Cenchræe, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a **patron [benefactor/helpful]** of many and of myself as well."

### 1. DEACONS ARE RELIEVERS TO THE ELDERS.

**Note:** Relievers doesn't mean taking the place of elders but relieving elders from mundane pressures of church life so that they can stay focused on their essential responsibilities.

## APOSTLES:

- ❖ **Acts 6:2-4**, And the twelve [Apostles] 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 [deacon] tables. 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. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry [deaconing] of the word.”
- ❖ **Acts 6:7**, 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.
  - ▶ **Problem:** Serving the Tables
  - ▶ **Responsibility:** Preaching the Word of God
  - ▶ **Solution:** Seven [prototype of Deacons]
  - ▶ **Result:** The word of God multiplied

## ELDERS:

- ❖ **Acts 20:28**, Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, **to care for the church of God**, which he obtained with his own blood. [cf. Heb. 13:17]
- ❖ **1 Timothy 5:17**, Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who **labor in preaching and teaching**. [counseling also is a kind of teaching]
- ❖ **2 Timothy 2:2**, What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses **entrust to faithful men**, who will be able to teach others also.

**Note:** Elders stand on the shoulders of deacons to care for the spiritual welfare of the church. Without deacons, the burden of physical affairs of the church fall upon the shoulders of the elders, stifling their preaching, teaching, counseling, and training ministry in the church.

**Benjamin Merkle:** The Bible does not clearly indicate the function of deacons. But based on the pattern established in Acts 6 with the apostles

and the Seven, it seems best to view **the deacons as servants who do whatever is necessary to allow the elders to accomplish their God-given calling of shepherding and teaching the church.** [*40 Questions about Elders and Deacons, pg. 240*]

**Phil A Newton:** In the servant role, deacons take care of those mundane and temporal matters of church life so that elders are freed to concentrate upon spiritual matters. [*Elders in Congregational Life, pg. 41*]

**Matt Smethurst:** Without effective deacons, elders will suffer incessant distraction and get sacked by an onrush of practical demands. Show me a church with distracted pastors and a derailed mission, and I will show you a church without effective deacons.

## **2. DEACONS CARE FOR THE PHYSICAL NEEDS OF THE CHURCH.**

**Acts 6:1-2,** 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**. 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**.”

**Tim Keller, pastor and author,** asks, “What does a deacon do? He ministers in the name of Jesus among lonely, sick, elderly, orphaned, widowed, dying, poor, and deprived people.”

**William Godfrey, pastor and author:** “The diaconate ought not be content to concern themselves only with those obvious needs which drop into their laps. . . . Deacons who do not spend time getting to know the members of the congregation will have no hope of discovering the needs which require their attention and intervention. Thus, the ministry of deacons . . . must be proactive.”

## **3. DEACONS PROMOTE PEACE AND UNITY IN THE CHURCH**

**Acts 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.

**Note:** Deacons must watch out for factors triggering discord and disunity in the church and bring peace.

**Jamie Dunlop**, The Greek-speaking Jews began to complain “against” the Hebrew-speaking Jews concerning the distribution of food. The church therefore chose seven men to distribute food equitably, yes, but, more than that, **to restore unity where there was division. Unity-building** was their primary goal; good administration was the means.

**Matt Smethurst**: The diaconate is designed to safeguard the harmony of the church. Just as the seven were tasked to salvage the unity of the Jerusalem church, so deacons today (as we have seen) are meant to play a pivotal role as “shock absorbers” in congregational life.

**Examples:**

- ▶ Reconciling interpersonal conflicts among believers in the church
- ▶ Reconciling tension between elders and believers
- ▶ Solving issues in the church due to poor management

**4. DEACONS TAKE CARE OF CHURCH ADMINISTRATION.**

**Such as:**

- Handling finance
- Arrangements for public worship
- Organizing/monitoring church programs
- Execute the decisions (practical affairs) of the elders and serving in all specific capacities as the church has need

**Alexander Strauch, *Paul’s Vision for Deacons***: The specific tasks of the deacons are to be determined by the elders in accordance with the church’s particular needs, size, and giftedness of its members. Certainly elders need continuous help with official hospital visits and phone calls, checking on absentees, managing charitable gifts, distributing aid to the needy, assisting families in distress, visiting and protecting the elderly and shut-ins, helping with finances, overseeing church property, and carrying out certain administrative tasks.

**Matt Smethurst**: It’s crucial to emphasize that the most effective deacons don’t do everything themselves. They are mobilizers. Note how Van Dam

concludes his reflections on Acts 6: “We may therefore assume that the seven did not personally do the distributing but would have played a coordinating, helping, and overseeing role to ensure none was bypassed.”

In terms of emphases, though, **Jamie Dunlop’s** framework is helpful:

- Elders **lead** ministry.
- Deacons **facilitate** ministry.
- The congregation **does** ministry.

**Reward for Deacons:** “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)

**David Guzik:** There is little doubt that you will see more deacons with a great reward than bishops or pastors.

#### **TWO REWARDS:**

- ▶ **[Gain a good standing *[gaining a good reputation]* for themselves]** Those who do well as deacons will be rewarded with respect from the church family and praise from God in the coming age.
- ▶ **[Great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus]** They will grow more/deeper in their faith in Christ Jesus.

**Ron Daniel, expository preacher:** Men who serve well as deacons obtain a high standing in the faith. I'll tell you what, there are few people that I respect more in the church than our deacons who serve so selflessly. Practically, they do a lot of manual labor. They set up chairs, clean toilets, vacuum carpets, and shovel snow. They show up early and stay late with a single thought: to serve without earthly reward. Their hope is that you can come to church and not have to think about anything besides worshipping, fellowshiping, and receiving the teaching. And what amazes me is the high standing that these men leave in the secular world in order to become servants and janitors to you. Among our deacons are a doctor, an engineer, a business owner, and a master sergeant. They receive no respectful greetings, no pay, and no recognition. But their position in my heart and in God's kingdom is exalted.