

Lesson #4 – Deacons and Qualifications for Ordained Officers

Acts 11:27-30 And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. 28 Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. 29 Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. 30 This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

I. Elder

A. Teaching Elder (TE) vs Ruling Elder (RE)

1 Tim 5:17 Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.

Distinction made between two different roles of elders – all elders rule, but some also teach.

B. Duties of Ruling Elder (RPCNA Directory for Church Government):

1. Active pastoral care of the congregation.
2. Regular attendance and participation in session meetings.
3. Involvement in and oversight of the teaching ministry of the congregation.
4. Involvement in and oversight of the observance of the sacraments.
5. Training of the whole congregation to mature discipleship.
6. Ministry to the erring and lost.
7. Visitation to the sick and needy.
8. Dedication to the advancement of the whole church of Christ.
9. Regular participation in the higher courts of the church.
10. Meeting jointly with the board of deacons periodically for evaluation and growth in their respective ministries.

C. Duties of Teaching Elder (in addition to above RE duties also)

1. Proclaiming God's Word in worship.
2. Administering the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.
3. Conducting wedding and funeral services.

II. Deacon in the NT

The Greek term translated "deacon" is *diakonos*, meaning "servant." This word appears 29 times in the New Testament. The term *diakonos*, like many biblical words, has both a broad general meaning (servant) and a specific technical meaning (deacon).

Examples of broad use:

Luke 22:25-27 And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them...But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves (*diakonon*). 27 For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves (*diakonon*)? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves (*diakonon*). John 12:26 If anyone serves (*diakone*) Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant (*diakonos*) will be also. If anyone serves (*diakone*) Me, him My Father will honor.

Examples of specific/technical use to describe the formal office of deacon:

Phil 1:1 - Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the **bishops** and **deacons**...

1 Tim 3:8-13 - 8 Likewise **deacons** must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, 9 holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. 10 But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as **deacons**, being found blameless. 11 Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. 12 Let **deacons** be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. 13 For those who have served well as **deacons** obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

- In both Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3 above, deacons are mentioned in close connection with the elders.
- Elder criteria is listed in Titus 1 and 1 Tim 3, but in 1 Tim 3 directly after elder qualifications we read in verse 8, "*Likewise deacons must be...*"

The mention of deacons in such tight connection with eldership *and* the fact that deacons must meet a list of qualifications in order to serve, strongly suggest that deacon, like elder, was a formal office in the New Testament churches.

Acts 6:1-4 Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. 2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. 3 Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; 4 but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

Verse 1 shows that at this time the church is growing, and as a result, practical ministry is being neglected. As the church in Jerusalem grew, the apostles found themselves unable to carry the burden of both theological and practical leadership. So they lightened their load by delegating important ministry tasks to proven men who demonstrated appropriate character and gifting.

Difference between elders and deacons:

Elders are appointed first, then deacons. Elders must be raised up as soon as possible in order to guard the gospel and refute error (Titus 1:9). Deacons may be appointed later as the practical ministry needs increase.

A. The duties of deacons

"The Diaconate is a spiritual office responsible for the ministry of mercy and stewardship of the congregation. It is neither a ruling nor a teaching office. Its exercise, like the whole life of the church, is under the oversight of the session and its function is administrative." - Directory for Church Government, Section III

Duties include:

1. Regular attendance and participation in the meetings of the deacon board.
2. Meeting jointly with the session periodically for prayer, evaluation and growth in their respective ministries.
3. Maintaining an active ministry of mercy, such as:
 - a. Leading the congregation in discerning and ministering to needs such as:
 1. local needs of individuals and institutions,

- 2. national and international needs.
- b. Gathering and distribution of funds.
- c. Training the congregation in the use of the members' gifts in the ministry of mercy.
- d. Helping the congregation evaluate requests for funds by organizations outside the denomination.
- 4. Maintaining an active ministry of stewardship, such as:
 - a. Overseeing the work of the treasurer.
 - b. Appointing a finance committee as needed.
 - c. Keeping the congregation informed at least quarterly of financial needs.
 - d. Securing an annual audit of all the congregation's accounts.
 - e. Preparing an annual budget in conjunction with the session.
 - f. Offering family budget counseling.
 - g. Teaching principles of giving.
 - h. Overseeing the maintenance of property.
- 5. Developing these ministries by personal visitation.
- 6. Performing other duties assigned to them by the session, congregation or presbytery.

III. Qualifications for Offices

A. Elder

1. In Scripture – 1 Tim 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9

1 Tim 3:1-7 This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop,[a] he desires a good work. 2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach;3 not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money,[b] but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; 4 one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence 5 (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); 6 not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. 7 Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Titus 1:5-9 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you— 6 if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. 7 For a bishop[b] must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, 8 but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, 9 holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

2. Directory for Church Government

- a. Be male communicant members in good standing of the Reformed Presbyterian Church.
- b. Evidence the standards of character and conduct consistent with those set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-7; in Titus 1:5-9; and 1 Peter 5:1-3.
- c. Be knowledgeable and committed to the subordinate doctrinal standards of the denomination as being consistent with the Scriptures.

In addition to above, TE *“must display the Spirit’s call and gifts to study diligently and proclaim publicly the Word of God (1 Timothy 5:17).”*

B. Deacon

1. In Scripture – 1 Tim 3:8-13

8 Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, 9 holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. 10 But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. 11 Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. 13 For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

2. Directory for Church Government

- a. Be communicant members in good standing of the Reformed Presbyterian Church.
- b. Evidence the standards of character and conduct consistent with those set forth in Acts 6:3; 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and 1 Corinthians 12:28.
- c. Be knowledgeable in and committed to the subordinate doctrinal standards of the denomination as being consistent with Scriptures.

3. Must one be a "male" to qualify for the office of deacon?

RPCNA position is females can also hold office of deacon (deaconess).

RP Testimony 25.8. *The permanent officers to be set apart by ordination are elders and deacons. The office of elder is restricted in Scripture to men. Women as well as men may hold the office of deacon.*

- a. Support for deaconesses

Rom 16:1-2 I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant (*diakonos*) of the church in Cenchrea, 2 that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.

RP Testimony 25.9 *The responsibility of the elders is in teaching and ruling.*

25.11 *The diaconate is a spiritual office subordinate to the session and is not a teaching or ruling office. The deacons have responsibility for the ministry of mercy, the finances and property of the congregation, and such other tasks as are assigned to them by the session.*

Ultimately, deaconess issue, or any issue, we may disagree upon must be changed through proper channels – the courts of the church.