

# 7

## *Deacons*

“Deacon” is a term primarily denoting “a servant”. It’s the specific term relating a servant to his work, not the word for denoting a servant to his master (as in a slave). The Greek word is believed to have come from a root meaning, “to hasten after, to pursue” as of a runner. The term tells us a deacon is someone who’s diligent to attend to the work that’s set before him.

The term “deacon” in 1 Timothy 3:8 is found 30 times in the New Testament and is translated:

3 times as “deacon”, (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8,12)

20 times as “minister” (Matthew 20:26; Mark 10:43; Romans 13:4; 15:8; 1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 3:6; 6:4; 11:15,23; Gal. 2:17; Eph. 3:7; 6:21; Col. 1:7,23,25; 4:7; 1 Thess. 3:2; 1 Tim. 4:6)

7 times as “servant”, (Matthew 22:13; 23:11; Mark 9:35; John 2:5,9; 12:26; Romans 16:1)

The term’s also translated in various forms such as a verb.

With the women liberationists struggling on every front for prominence, we find them shouting there were women who filled the church office of a deacon. This is in error. My Vines Dictionary is very specific in its declaration that Romans 16:1 is the only place in the New Testament where the word is used of a woman. To say this particular verse shows women can fill the office of the deacon would be a real twist. For a demonstration of how this is so, look at the list of verses where that word is also used. Look at

John 2:5,9. There we see the servants at the wedding feast Jesus attended. The “servants” weren’t in positions of leadership. To jump to Romans 16:1 insisting it was, is plain dishonest. As I covered in the definition of the term, “deacon”, the word denotes an active servant. We’re all called to service for each other, the church and the Lord. The action of serving is done by men and women. Don’t tolerate dishonesty with this word when you hear distortions, forcing it to mean more than it did.

## Deacons To Be Men of Honor

I think the position of Deacon is too often considered a low position. People think of the account in Acts:

*1 And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. 2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. 3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost 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.* Acts 6:1-4

This account describes the first official call for the office of deacon. They weren’t officially called “deacons” in this passage, but the responsibilities were those of deacons. The context however, tends to give the impression this office is of low importance, since it isn’t associated the preaching and teaching position of elders. This office can be compared with Paul’s consideration on marriage found in 1 Corinthians chapter 7. From reading that, many come away with the impression marriage is less enviable, and the highest aim is to remain unmarried. A closer look shows the point isn’t ambition but calling.

The deacon needs special skills an elder may not possess. The man who’s qualified to be an elder may not necessarily pass as a good deacon. This may come as a surprise to many, but consider some aspects of a business, and see how they follow through:

A corporation appoints its Chief Executive Officer who oversees different departments that comprise the entire business. For an automobile corporation, the CEO doesn't have to know how to operate welding robotic machinery, painting quality secrets or advertising tactics, or even how to operate the floor waxing machine of the janitorial division. He needs to know how to pick good men for the job who can do these things. He may see the need for improving corporate appearance so call the advertising department and car designing division heads together for brainstorming this. That CEO might go back to college, taking a course in advertising design and totally fail in that career choice. Why? He lacks the natural talents needed for that line of work. If he decided to use his connections to get a job at the auto plant in the design department anyway, he might actually handicap the department causing it to turn out poorer quality work!

What's the implication in the area of Church Government? We find Elders typically trying to run every area of the church. They try to take care of areas that should be left in the hands of Deacons. The danger here is that of disorder and discouragement. If the Elders happen to be skillful in business affairs, all goes reasonably well. If not, the meeting can fail in numerous ways:

- They may drag on decision making processes indefinitely.
- They may quibble about the different choices and not come to agreement.
- It may cause observers to be disgusted, coming to the conclusion they'll stay away from such meetings in the future.
- It may cause a current deacon to get discouraged and end up leaving his calling.

The skills of a deacon call for efficient organizing and for the qualities listed in Acts 6:3, "*honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom*".

Only such men will gather for leadership decisions avoiding the dangers that can and will come up. If men, who aren't true men of God, fill the office of deacon or try to fulfill the work of

that office, the results can be a nightmare. The meeting may look something like this:

Adam calls the meeting to order. Aaron brings up the first order of business, the church parking lot needs repaving. Andrew feels it should be redone in concrete this time. Alex is used to living on a tight budget and opts for gravel. Alfred wants to resurface only. Abraham is so disorganized he didn't do the asked for research because he forgot it. Adam calls for a vote and needs to come to a decision. The vote gives no decided direction. Adam decides for his personal choice - resurfacing, since he's the chairman. After the meeting we find Alex complains about unwise excessive use of church funds. Andrew complains about poor use of church funds because it simply won't last as long. Etc. etc.

As you can see, men who aren't "*full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom*" won't seek God's will, and they'll walk in a spirit of disunity. They have bad feelings towards not having their way, and they cause strife during the meetings. If there are any in the meeting who are full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, they may become so disheartened as weeks roll into months of this sort of fiasco, they say enough is enough and leave. Who could blame them? Without the proper men being appointed to office, the proper man, who may be in this midst, won't be able to steer such a group of men into the will of God. They're much too opinionated to make any progress with! The result is that those who might be right for the position will observe the conditions and run the other way. Such dangers cause the people of God to scorn the things of God! Is it God's fault? No! It's the poor appointment of deacons that lies at the heart of such failure. Having seen the gravity of choosing deacons appropriately, let's move on to the deacon's qualifications:

## **Qualifications For Deacons**

There's only one other passage that describes the kind of man a deacon is to be:

**1 TIMOTHY**

*8 Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; 9 Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. 10 And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. 11 Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. 12 Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. 13 For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.* *1 Timothy 3:8-13*

These verses follow upon the heels of the qualifications for the elders. They reinstate the same qualities to be found in this person as is to be found among those called as elders. Notice the beginning of verse 8, “*Likewise must*”. These potential deacons are to be as exemplary as the elders. Their sphere of operation just focuses on the managerial and outreach functions found within the local church.

In verse 10 we see they’re to be men who are tested as to their worthiness, **BEFORE they’re placed in this office!** These men aren’t operating as managers of businesses, they’re functioning as representatives of Jesus for the managerial and outreach functions of the church. A heavy responsibility that CANNOT be carried out by just a good Christian business manager.

Verses 11 and 12 give the clear testimony the office is for men. Those who use Romans 16:1 as their support verse for women deacons have to use a very scanty verse (no details to clarify all that was meant) in total defiance of this clear passage of specific qualifications.

It appears that verse 13 also carried the future consideration of those who might think little of this office. Paul wanted everyone to know this was an office of honor for honorable men.

Referring back to the passage in Acts 6, I want to read a couple more verses:

*5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they*

*chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: 8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.* Acts 6:5,8

*5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them 6 And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.* Acts 8:5,6

These men, chosen to fill the office, were men who had greater ministerial outreaches than most evangelists today could claim to have done. Steven was martyred and did great miracles. Philip preached, leading to the conversion of many. Today we would view such in the greatest honor. It was men such as these who were chosen as deacons.

## **Role Of A Deacon**

The deacon's sphere of operation focuses on the managerial and outreach functions in the local church.

A local church cannot reasonably function with just preaching alone. There are material needs. Even if a local church doesn't have its own building, there's the oversight of seeing none of the brethren are suffering need with no relief. There is the need to see visiting Christians are cared for. In the Acts 6 account, we see the need arose for the widow's care to have some oversight. From that account, we can see the need was noted and referred to the apostles. They, in turn, set up a management committee on spiritual grounds. The apostles did all they should have done. It was beyond their sphere to step into that area, trying to do everything. If they had invested their time in that area, preaching and prayer would have suffered.

We see the apostles ordained the chosen men:

*6 Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.* Acts 6:6

The apostles noted the problem, appointed others to take care of it, then left the details to those chosen others. Those

chosen didn't have to physically carry out all the labors involved to fulfill their tasks. They would have been fulfilling their roles by appointing others to carry out the tasks. Much as a military leader has soldiers under him who carry out the needed tasks.

A thriving, healthy and active church will have many areas of ministry, and will have a whole body that will be functioning as a human body does. Our body doesn't just leave all the tasks to one organ. The whole body has its chores to accomplish. In the same way, the local body of Christ should have its members actively functioning to help the body grow, increase in strength, and carry on in the right way. It should be working as a whole to encourage and direct each member to use the talents God has entrusted to each of us as He sees fit:

*14 For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. 15 And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. 16 Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. 17 And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. 18 But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. 19 After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. 20 And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord thou deliveredst unto me five talents; behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. 21 His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. 22 He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. 23 His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. 24 Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I*

*knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: 25 And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. 26 His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: 27 Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. 28 Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. 29 For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. 30 And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Matthew 25:14-30*

Now maybe we can understand better why the deacon has to be a man truly walking with God to help us all to actively utilize our commissions.