

Dear friends and family,

Deacons. Perhaps the most well known office of the church. However, also quite possibly the most varied in position, duty, and function. It is likely that no two churches treat the office of Deacon the same. In some instances, Deacons serve as de-facto leaders of the church. Sometimes, they hold the office of Elders. Elsewhere, “Deacon” is little other than a title without real responsibility. In some churches only men can be Deacons while others allow women to hold the office as well. Considering all of these approaches, it is important to turn to the pages of scripture to seek to understand what God intends the office of Deacon to entail.

The office of the Deacon was first introduced in Acts 6.

It is the first and oldest of the official offices established by the early church.

While the church was still in its infancy, led by the Apostles themselves, a need arose.

The need was immediate and real.

However, when it was brought before the Apostles, they responded in the following manner,

“It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.” Acts 6:2

The word translated here as ‘serve’ is the Greek word *diakoneo*.

Read Acts 6:1-6

Notice how this vital role in the church came about.

The church chose the men but the Apostles confirmed them. (Acts 6:3 & 6)

The men were chosen expressly for the task of serving the needs of the church as it grew. (Acts 6:1)

Take note regarding the qualifications the Apostles indicated as necessary for this office. (Acts 6:3)

Pastor’s Point of View

The big question this week: **What importance does the role of Deacon play in today’s church?**

Day 1 – READ 1 Timothy 3:8-10

1. Write out and define each of the individual qualifications of the office of the Deacon.
2. Many people serve in the church today and don’t hold the official title of Deacon, does this text support or forbid that construct?
3. Reflect on what it means to “hold to the mystery of the faith” (Eph. 5:32, 1 Cor. 2:1-7)

Day 2 – READ 1 Timothy 3:11-12

Context is key. Over the past few weeks, we studied Paul's letters to Timothy regarding men and women serving in the church. Scripture specifies that leadership over the church, in the position of overseer, is solely reserved for male leaders. Three Greek terms are used almost interchangeably for the head office of the church, overseer. These words are *presbeuo* translated as elder, *poimen* translated as pastor/shepherd, and *episcopo* translated overseer/bishop. Each of these terms refers to the head office or officers of the church. Scripture teaches that these are roles reserved for male leadership. Notice that the office of the Deacon does not receive the same gender specification. Consider 1 Timothy 3:8-13:

1. Gender specific language is largely absent in the original text. The only place gender is specifically noted occurs in verses 11 and 12. The word 'men' is added to verses 8 and 10 in the English translation. What is Paul telling Timothy about the role of the Deacon as it pertains to men and women?
2. Remember the importance of the culture at the time Paul was writing. It is unlikely that a married woman would be able to serve in the church for no other purpose than sheer lack of time. The entirety of the household was her responsibility. She bought and prepared daily meals- remember, this is before refrigerators, indoor plumbing, and microwaves! She raised and educated all of their children. No fast food, take out, public schools, or automobiles. Walking daily to the well for water consumed much time, as did food preparation, and gathering. The woman of the house did it all! However, logistically, single women could more easily serve in the church, which Paul addresses. Notice how the qualifications for women, specifically in verse 11, exactly mirror the qualifications for a Deacon in general given in verse 8.
3. Married men are addressed next. A married man must not only meet all of the qualifications, but he must also meet what extra qualifications listed in verse 12?

Day 3 – READ Romans 16:1-2

1. Romans, another letter written by Paul, specifically mentions Phoebe, “our sister...a deacon of the church at Cencheria”. Do you see this as confirmation that Scripture encourages women to hold the office of Deacon in the church?
2. Many Bible scholars not only believe that Phoebe was an official Deacon but was also entrusted to carry the very letter to the church at Rome, in which her name is mentioned.
3. Consider how each detail included in Scripture is important and intentional. Any other passages come to mind?

Day 4 – READ 1 Timothy 3:13

There is a natural progression through this specific passage of scripture. Verses 8-10 give the general qualifications and tests for one to hold the office of Deacon. Verses 11-12 address men and women in particular as it relates uniquely to each of them regarding holding the office. Verse 13 concludes this section with the blessing that comes from service.

1. What does Paul tell Timothy is in store for those who serve as Deacons?
2. Do you think the church in general does a good job today of selecting, testing, and encouraging Deacons to serve in the manner Paul outlines here?
3. Why might it be important for Deacons to have great confidence in the faith?

In 1990, Ken Hemphill, former president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary wrote, “While we must avoid dogmatism at this point, I feel the evidence seems to favor the interpretation that Paul was turning his attention to the women who were also deacons...” While some English translations of the Bible present verse 11 as “their wives”, the original Greek has no mention of the pronoun “their” and the word translated as “wives” is the generic term for women, which could include wives but does not necessarily.

Scripture provides insight into serving the body of Christ, qualifications for service, and the blessings that come with serving the Lord. Consider today how you can serve the Lord. Sometimes we have official titles, sometimes our work is never seen, and sometimes God calls us to roles we never expected to fill. Yielding your life in obedience to God and his word are what I pray for you. May you seek first the kingdom of God!

Blessings in service,
Pastor Matt

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*Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us **RUN** with endurance the race that is set before us -- Hebrews 12:1*

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