

DOCTRINE OF DEACONS

- I.** Preliminary considerations.
- A.** The office of deacon is one of the two extant offices authorized for the local church for the Church Age (CA).
 - B.** The only other authorized office is that of pastor-teacher. 1Tim.3:1,8
 - C.** Unlike the pastor-teacher, who is selected by God and bestowed upon the church, the deacon is a volunteer whose office is administered by men. Eph.4:11 cp. Act.6:3
 - D.** Neither office is to be confused with the spiritual gift that a believer possesses. (See Doctrine of Spiritual Gifts)
 - E.** A deacon may possess any combination of gifts except pastor-teacher.
 - F.** However, it would seem appropriate for a deacon to possess an administrative gift. 1Cor.12:28
 - G.** Other gifts that would be useful would be helps and exhortation.
 - H.** In the Royal chain of Command (R/CC), the deacon is ranked below the pastor-teacher and above the general congregation. Act.6:3
- II.** Vocabulary.
- A.** Since the office did not come into existence until the CA there is no OT vocabulary.
 - B.** Greek vocabulary:
 - 1.** δῆκονος – Used 30x. Means “one who executes the commands of another/one who runs errands/a servant, minister/deacon”.
 - 2.** δῆκονέω – Used 37x. Means “to render service or ministry/to wait on tables/ to administer the physical aspects of life to those in need/to function as a deacon”.
 - 3.** πρεσβύτερος – Used 67x. When used of age it means “advanced in age/older”; when used of the office of deacon it indicates a measure of spiritual age or maturity.
 - 4.** These terms had a technical usage that was to describe the office of function of deacons. They also had a general or non-technical usage.
 - 5.** δῆκονος, from which we get the term deacon, is used 3x with respect to the office of deacon. Phi.1:1; 1Tim.3:8,12
 - 6.** The verb δῆκονέω, is used 2x in connection with the function of deacons. 1Tim.3:10,13
 - 7.** πρεσβύτερος, translated “elder”, is a word of Jewish origin and denotes that a deacon is to possess a certain measure of spiritual maturity.
 - a.** In the gospels, it has only a non-technical use and never used to designate a church office, but in the traditional Jewish sense for teachers, leaders of synagogues, rulers of the people and those who acted with authority in the nation. Ex. Mat.15:2; 21:23
 - b.** In the book of Acts (which records the transition from the Age of Israel into the Church Age), the word is used both non-technically and technically.
 - 1)** Non-technically for the rulers of the Jews. Act.4:5,8
 - 2)** Technically for officers of local churches, including both pastor-teachers and deacons (Act.15:2,4,22,23; 16:4) and pastor-teachers (Act.20:17 cp.vs.28).

- 3) In the epistles, the transition of use regarding “religious” hierarchy is completed and only refers to authorities in the Church to include:
 - a) Both pastor-teachers and deacons (1Tim.5:17; Jam.5:14); pastor-teachers (Ti.1:5 cp.7).
 - b) Specifically to denote the head of the local church (P-T) to also include Apostles. 1Pet.5:1 cp.2; 2Joh.1:1; 3Joh.1:1 (The word “elder” with reference to Peter and John has the definite article “the fellow elder or the elder/ὁ συμπρεσβύτερος and ὁ πρεσβύτερος” and denotes the Apostolic office as the supreme/highest office of the local church.)
 - c. Even with a congregation of new converts, a church board should be selected based on spiritual discernment. Act.14:23 *“And when they (Paul and Company) had appointed/χειροτονῶ/hand picked elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”* These individuals had only been saved a short time, yet Paul placed them in charge of the local churches and a R/CC was established.
 - d. In the beginning of the CA, it appears that there was no formal distinction made between the P-T and the deacons.
 - e. Since the newly formed local churches had no existing leadership (Other than the Apostle of that canon who was constantly on the move), and the temporary gifts were functioning, which allowed for multiple persons to be involved in the church service, the leadership seems to have been handled by a group of men (prophets & teachers 1Cor.12:28) as opposed to a single P-T. 1Cor.14:22-33
 - f. However, by the time of the writing of 1Timothy, a clear distinction was made between the overseer/P-T and the deacons.
 - g. One must be cognizant of the fact that the transitional period was just that and not to be the norm for the CA. However, things were gradually organized into their desired form.

III. The origin of the office of deacon. Act.6:1-6

- A. The office came into existence as a result of a need in the early church at Jerusalem. vs.1 *“...because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving..”*
 1. The apostles were in charge of every aspect of the congregation including administering the “helps” ministry.
 2. It was an essential ministry but it was taking them away from their primary responsibility to study, teach and pray. vss.2,4
 3. It also denotes that the quality of service expected to be applied toward the church was in danger of becoming less than desirable.
 4. From this came the origin of the office.
- B. The apostles brought the need before the church. vs.2 *“And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable for us*

to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. vs.3a ...But select from among you, brethren, seven men...

1. They pointed out that an undesirable situation had arisen.
 2. They gave them a directive to select/seek out/choose/pick/visit/ἐπισκέπτομαι (has absolutely no nuance of “a nominating process”) seven men to cover this need/ministry.
 3. This they noted would free them up to devote themselves to their primary functions as the spiritual leaders of the church, vs.2 study/”..not desirable to neglect the word of God..”, vs.4 “...devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry/**διακονία/administer/arrangement for provision/serving the food or teaching of the word.**”
- C. They outlined the qualifications the seven deacons should possess. vs.3 “...seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.”
1. “Good reputation” requires that the deacon must have credibility/trustworthiness with those they serve.
 2. “Full of/filled with the Spirit” indicates men who maintain the filling ministry of the HS, able to adequately isolate the STAs on a consistent basis in order to maintain a spiritual dynamic.
 3. “Full of wisdom” required men with a level of Divine viewpoint not only to know God’s will on a wide range of subjects, but also to possess the discernment necessary to apply it to a given situation (such as the need and complaint of vs.1).
 4. “Whom we may put in charge/καθίστημι/appoint (future active indicative “we will put in charge” and shows based on the qualifications being met the apostles will in fact appoint them) indicates:
 - a. One who is willing to be faithful/dedicated/committed and sensible/discerning /wise in their service to their authorities and to those whom they serve. Mat.24:45; 25:21,23 cp.26 (the parable of the talents, which emphasizes the initiative/motivation of application)
 - b. One who is willing to accept the responsibilities placed upon them to carry out the needs of others. 1Tim.3:1 “*It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires/ὀρέγεται/stretch oneself toward/reach out for/strive for/longs for/is so motivated to the office of overseer..*” cp. vs.8 “*Deacons likewise...*”
- D. The church responded to the leadership of the apostles. vs.5 “*And the statement found approval with the whole congregation/assembly;...*”
1. They saw the spiritual issue at stake and responded immediately.
 2. They sought out men who were willing to accept the responsibilities and fulfilled the qualifications.
 3. They picked seven men who were Greeks (Gentile deacons for a predominantly Hebrew congregation) to diffuse the complaint of the Greeks and showing the spiritual wisdom of the congregation.
- E. They brought the seven to the apostles for final approval and the seven were then ordained. vs.6
- F. Observations based on the origin of the office.
1. Some problems and needs in the local church are of such a nature that they need to be addressed by leadership.

2. Application: Don't be reticent to bring what you perceive to be a legitimate problem to the board.
3. Application: Legitimate needs determine what is to be designated as a "ministry" in the local church. Ex. Helps ministry such as living grace, widows, prep school, etc.
4. The primary function of the P-T is to study, teach and pray.
5. The primary purpose of origination and primary function of the office of deacon is to relieve the P-T of other various, necessary aspects of the ministry that can be handled by a competent believer.
6. A deacon or deacon candidate must first reflect solid spiritual traits regarding their personal life that commends himself to others and secondly must express his desire to do so.
7. Application: One who does not personally desire and possess self-motivation via their understanding of BD to serve in this capacity, no matter their level of spirituality, will produce a less than desirable "servant".
8. Application: If a deacon does not fulfill his responsibility and is not diligent to see that his area(s) are properly administered is quite limited in terms of his value to the ministry.
9. The deacon must have approval of the majority of the local church members.
10. The leadership of the local church determines what constitutes needs of the congregation and is the final authority with regard to how many and the timing for deacon(s) and as to who qualifies for the office.

IV. Qualifications for those seeking the office (the deacon godliness code). Act.6:3; 1Tim.3:8-12

- A.** Must be a male. Act.6:3; 1Tim.3:8; cp. 2:12
- B.** Must have a good reputation among those in the local church. Act.6:3
- C.** Must be Spirit-filled. Act.6:3
- D.** Must aspire to the office. 1Tim.3:8 cp. 3:1
- E.** Must be one of dignity: vs.8
 1. For a deacon to command respect, he must act in a dignified manner.
 2. His office is to reflect a seriousness of purpose, an overt decorum, unflappable/levelheaded in face of difficulty and has an absence of silliness when carrying out his duties.
- F.** He is not to be double-tongued, which has a nuance of: vs.8
 1. Two-faced or hypocritical; doesn't practice what he enforces.
 2. Untrustworthy or false; not reliable by being evasive or circumventing.
 3. One who is double-dealing such as showing partiality.
 4. It is a man who says one thing to one person and a conflicting thing to another so that on comparing notes, the discrepancy becomes apparent.
 5. One who supports a doctrine or issue verbally, but in the presence of others contradicts it is unfit to serve.
 6. This trait is bad enough in any person, but especially an officer of the board who deals with people and is to represent the truth as it is taught.
- G.** Must be one who is not a drunkard and applies sufficient moderation in drinking so as not to distract from his witness and function. vs.8
- H.** He is not to be fond of sordid gain indicating one who engages in dishonest business practices: vs.8

1. This can bring a bad name upon the local church.
 2. It can lead to bad decisions where church funds are involved.
- I. He must consistently possess/hold to the workings of the plan of God via BD and that with a clear conscience denoting: vs.9
1. He must possess a background of the WOG based on sufficient time under face-to-face teaching. Cp. Act.6:3 “*wisdom*”
 2. In order to have a clear conscience he must:
 - a) Lead by example of application of the teaching.
 - b) This means adherence to MPR.
 - c) He must show diligence with respect to his office.
 - d) It demands compliance with quality.
- J. Deacon candidates are to submit to a period of testing before approval for office. vs.10 (This will be expanded upon in point V.)
- K. Deacon’s wives also must maintain a high level of godliness: vs.11
1. She too must maintain an over decorum of dignity.
 2. She must have self-control over temptation to gossip (verbal sinning), especially since she may be privy to sensitive information.
 3. She must be temperate exercising moderation and not given to excesses.
 4. She is to be totally faithful and supportive surrounding the responsibilities of her husband’s office.
 5. Deacon’s wives (or women) can serve even in administrative capacities, but never in a position to exercise authority over men.
- L. Deacons are to practice monogamy and maintain faithfulness in their marriage. vs.12
- M. He must maintain his children (still at home) under subjection to his authority, which will be manifested by their external control. vs.12
- N. In general, he must reflect management of his household and family, commanding obedience while ruling with a dignified manner such as: not yelling, disregarding his responsibilities physically and spiritually, etc.
- V. Before one is placed in the office, he must undergo a period of observation and testing to determine his fitness for the office. 1Tim.4:10
- A. It is obvious that the office of deacon has advanced in its expectations and instituting those into the office since the original office was formed in Act.6.
 - B. Paul makes it clear that any man who aspires to the office must provide overt proof of a true desire to serve. vs.10 “*and let these (Who’s these? Those who **aspire** to the office having determined within themselves that they meet these guidelines.) first be tested;...*”:
 1. The first order of business is for those who desire to serve in this capacity to make it known to the church leadership.
 2. Upon confirmation and agreement by both the existing deacons and the pastor (who will retain final authority) that the candidate meets the listed biblical qualifications, his name will be presented to the church as a candidate and he will begin a period of testing.
 3. During this period, the Board may assign specific duties to the candidate to evaluate areas of interest, expertise and particular gift(s) while providing the congregation with opportunity for input and personal evaluation.
 4. When an opening on the Board becomes available, assuming the candidate(s) “*are beyond reproach*”, they will be contacted and if

interested in the position, their name(s) will be submitted for vote by the congregation.

5. The period of “testing” is at the discretion of the church Board or for the length of time as determined by need.
6. Each member should accept or reject an individual based strictly on Biblical principles, not personality, friendship, etc.
7. A deacon approved for office will then be formally ordained and assigned his new duties by the Board.
8. Each deacon will continue to serve until:
 - a) He resigns.
 - b) His death.
 - c) He should become disqualified per violation of the deacon godliness code of point **IV**.
 - d) He loses the confidence of the congregation.

VI. The promise to the deacon for faithful service. 1Tim.3:13

- A. Two specific areas of blessing are promised to the deacon who executes his office appropriately.
- B. Both are contingent upon the time in office and the quality of service rendered by the deacon, vs.13a *“for those who have served well as deacons..”*.
- C. The first has to do with promotion in the plan of God.
 1. It comes only to those who have served well while in office.
 2. It requires a certain amount of time in the office, it is not a promise for the novice.
 3. It relates to temporal promotion in his personal life.
 4. It also relates to the recognition by others in the local church of his position and standing in the POG.
 5. It especially relates to his Ph3 and SG3 rewards.
- D. The second has to do with his mental attitude (MA) confidence.
 1. Over the years of service, the deacon will be placed into the situation of having to deal with problems in the local church.
 2. He will be put under pressure to apply in the face of opposition, antagonism and contrary circumstances demanding sacrifice of the servant.
 3. As he applies the principles of BD and grace over a period of time, he will develop a MA of great confidence.
 4. He will see that God vindicates the principles of BD and this will strengthen him to continue his application of servitude and sacrifice.
 5. Of course, this comes with experience and faithful service.

VII. Conclusion.

- A. The congregation’s attitude towards their deacons and pastor-teacher is to be in line with 1Thess.5:12,13; 1Tim.5:17; Heb.13:7.
- B. Deacons are directly responsible to insure that the P-T is free to study and teach and that he has what is necessary to his function.
- C. Deacons are responsible for the particular area of their assignment, but certainly need and must rely on other believers to aid them in carrying out their duties.
- D. Members of the local church should familiarize themselves with the church’s needs.

- E.** The deacons are to remember that while they have been given authority to accomplish the tasks at hand, they are servants of the congregation and the P-T so that all can pursue MPR and carry out the Royal Imperatives in an orderly way.
- F.** Deacon's wives and families are to be supportive of the deacon in every way.
- G.** Deacons are to set an example in attendance, Divine good production, isolation of the STA/OSN, reliability, patience and dignity.
- H.** It should be on every prayer list to pray continually for the board members.