

# Deacon Ministry Fundamentals

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## Deacon Ministry Fundamentals

### Problem

What are the fundamentals of Deacon Ministry in the Church?

### Premise

Deacons are to be worthy of respect and demonstrate increasing maturity in the faith.

### Philosophy

This lesson is about the birth and development of the Deacon Ministry, a new level of ministry in the early Church.

Acts 6:1 But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. The Greek-speaking believers complained about the Hebrew-speaking believers, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food.

2 So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers. They said, "We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program.

3 And so, brothers, select seven individuals who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will give them this responsibility.

4 Then we apostles can spend our time in prayer and teaching the word."

5 Everyone liked this idea, and they chose the following: Stephen (a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit), Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas of Antioch (an earlier convert to the Jewish faith).

6 These seven were presented to the apostles, who prayed for them as they laid their hands on them.

7 So God's message continued to spread. The number of believers greatly increased in Jerusalem, and many of the Jewish priests were converted, too.

1 Timothy 3:8 Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain.

- 9 They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.
- 10 And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.
- 11 Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.
- 12 Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.
- 13 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.

### Principle

1. There's nothing new about racial hostility.
  - a. The Jews of Palestine were more than a little suspicious of coreligionists from outside the homeland, who spoke Greek primarily and might not even know Aramaic.
  - b. The purity of their faith was questioned by both Pharisee and Essene.
  - c. Pharisees were members of a party that believed in resurrection and in following legal traditions that were ascribed not to the Bible but to “the traditions of the fathers.” They were also well-known legal experts. They were a social movement and a school of thought during the time of Second Temple Judaism. After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, Pharisaic beliefs became the foundational, liturgical, and ritualistic basis for Rabbinic Judaism.
  - d. The Essenes were a Jewish “sect” or school of philosophy with two branches: some were celibate, disdained marriage and adopted children; others believed that marriage and procreation were needed if the group was to continue and not disappear. Their community was hierarchical, structured, and disciplined.
  - e. Like the Pharisees, the Essenes meticulously observed the Law of Moses, the sabbath, and ritual purity. They also professed belief in immortality and divine punishment for sin. But, unlike the Pharisees, the Essenes denied the resurrection of the body and refused to immerse themselves in public life.
  - f. The Hebrews were Jewish Christians who spoke almost

- exclusively Aramaic, and the Hellenists were Jewish Christians whose mother tongue was Greek. They were Greek-speaking Jews of the Diaspora, who returned to settle in Jerusalem.
- g. Hellenistic Christianity was the attempt to reconcile Christianity with Greek philosophy, beginning in the late 2nd century. Drawing particularly on Platonism and the newly emerging Neoplatonism, figures such as Clement of Alexandria sought to provide Christianity with a philosophical framework.
  - h. It seems that the label "Hellenist" and the attitude were carried over when members of both groups converted to Christ.
  - i. Mistrust and discrimination led the Hellenic Jews to complain to the apostles.
2. Every church will have dissension.
    - a. Not its existence, but how we deal with it, is the measure of our spirituality.
  3. A problem arose in the church.
    - a. Some widows were being neglected.
    - b. Two groups or cliques were seen in the church, and one was complaining and grumbling about the actions of the other.
    - c. One group felt its needs were not being met; it was not getting a due share of the attention and care it deserved.
    - d. There were five reasons for the division.
  4. The Church had grown rapidly.
    - a. When any organization grows rapidly, all kinds of problems arise, and most of the problems center around how to handle the growth.
    - b. The church needed to minister to the new members, but it was having difficulty handling and reaching out to everyone.
    - c. The Pastors, that is, the apostles, could not get to everyone.
    - d. There were different groups or cliques coming into the church.
  5. There were the Hebrews, the Jews who were born and reared in Palestine.
    - a. They spoke Aramaic, the language that had come down from their ancient Hebrew language.
    - b. They rejected all Gentile and Greek culture completely, and used only the Hebrew Bible in its original Hebrew language.
    - c. The Hebrew or Palestinian Jews were so inclusive and

- closely-knit, they despised all Gentiles and Gentile culture.
- d. They actually despised and cursed the Gentiles, believing that the Gentiles were cursed eternally by God.
  - e. This hatred even included the Grecian Jews who had been relocated to other lands by the Romans.
6. The Grecian Jews were known as the Hellenists.
    - a. These were Jews who had been scattered, deported, and dispersed all over the world by the Romans.
    - b. Many of them would return for the great Feasts of Pentecost and the Passover.
    - c. Apparently some had been converted on the day of Pentecost or thereafter, and had either delayed their return home or decided to move back to Jerusalem.
  7. The Grecian or Hellenist Jews had adopted Greek culture, spoke the Greek language, and used and read the Greek Bible (the Septuagint).
    - a. It is probably this that lay at the root of the problem mentioned here.
    - b. The Hebrew Jews, having always been taught to reject and despise anything Grecian, were probably having difficulty getting rid of all their prejudice.
    - c. No doubt, God had worked in their hearts to cleanse them of prejudice, but they apparently were still hanging on to some feelings against the Hellenists.
    - d. Perhaps they felt that the Hellenists or Grecian Jews were not due as much attention or as many rights as they were.
  8. People do and will form groups and cliques.
    - a. But we must always be open and accepting, outgoing and friendly, giving and helping, humble and undeserving before each other, ministering and receiving ministry from all.
    - b. Cliques and groups are dangerous.
  9. The apostles had a plan (Acts 6:1-7).
    - a. The apostles met and discussed the division and complaint among themselves.
    - b. They agreed upon a plan to address the tension in the Church.
    - c. They presented the plan to the congregation for consideration.
    - d. Individuals needed to be appointed to handle this ministry.

- e. The apostles did not deny the problem, they acknowledged that the problem did exist.
  - f. The apostles knew how easily people, in particular cliques when they feel neglected, can become suspicious and cause even more problems within the church.
  - g. The pastors declared their primary call and mission.
    - i. They had to concentrate on the Word of God, its study and proclamation.
    - ii. The apostles could have been easily sidetracked, caught up in the ministry of sitting and listening, serving and meeting the needs of the needy.
    - iii. Such needs must be met; it is the church members' duty to minister and meet them.
  - h. Pastors must put up a guard and protect their primary call to proclaim the Word of God.
    - i. They must above all else have time to prepare and preach and teach the Word (Matthew 10:27; Ephes. 3:7-8; 2 Tim. 1:11-12; 4:2).
    - ii. The pastors called for a whole new level of ministers.
    - iii. Up to this point, the leaders of the church were the apostles.
    - iv. Now a new office was being created to help in the work of the ministry (Matthew 9:37-38; John 4:35-36; 1 Cor. 3:8-9).
10. Deacons were being chosen and set aside to serve the Church.
- a. The word diakonein is used of ministers throughout the New Testament, deacons serve as ministers in meeting the day to day needs of the flock (Acts 6:4; 12:25; 21:19; Rom. 11:13).
  - b. This does not mean the apostles never met day to day needs of the flock nor that the deacons never shared the Word.
  - c. Both apostles and deacons served in both areas, but each concentrated upon their primary call and mission.
11. Deacons were appointed to help in the ministerial and administrative duties of the church (Acts 6:2).
- a. Their function is to relieve pastors so that pastors can give themselves "continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word" (Acts 6:4).

- b. In particular they are chosen to minister to the day-to-day needs of children, widows, widowers, the poor, the sick, and the facilities of the church.
  - c. Preachers are sometimes referred to as deacons, that is, servants (1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 3:6).
  - d. The first deacons preached as well as ministered to the needy of the church (Acts 6:8; 8:5).
  - e. Deacons are to be spiritually equipped for their task (Acts 6:3; 1 Tim. 3:8-13).
12. The qualifications for Church leaders center upon spiritual qualities and the spiritual maturity of those chosen and set aside.
- a. The deacon's duty was to read the Scriptures in church, to instruct the new converts in Christian truths, to assist the pastors at the Lord's Supper, to receive gifts and offerings, and to teach and instruct.
  - b. Just as an assistant (called a "Chazzan") covered and uncovered the Ark in the synagogue, so the deacon in the early church put the coverings on the Communion table.
  - c. Deacons must not say one thing to one person and something different to another; they must be consistent.
  - d. Deacons were constantly in touch with people and so might have a tendency to double talk.
  - e. Deacons must not be greedy of filthy lucre, "not pursuing dishonest gain."
  - f. This is especially important, for part of the deacon's job was to collect money and distribute gifts.
13. An honest report (martuoumenous).
- a. The deacon's character was to be proven and beyond reproach.
  - b. They were to be believers of integrity, faithful and trustworthy; moral and upright, believers trusted by all (2 Cor. 8:18; 1 Tim. 3:8-9; Eccles. 7:1).
14. Full of the Holy Spirit.
- a. The deacon was to be conscious of the indwelling Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23; Ephes. 3:19; 5:18-19).
15. Full of wisdom.
- a. The deacon must be able to discern, see through, make

- judgments.
- b. This was especially needed in handling the division that had arisen in the church.
  - c. Improper handling by unwise believers could only add fuel to the fire, causing further friction and tension (1 Cor. 2:12-13; Col. 1:9; James 3:17; 1 John 2:20).
16. Deacons must be born again believers of quality, even though their function in the congregation is significantly different than pastors and preachers (Phil. 1:1).
- a. The word translated "deacon" (diakonos) means literally a "humble servant."
  - b. The role of the deacons is to carry out, under the pastors' oversight, some of the more temporal tasks of the church so that the preachers can give their attention to the Word of God.
  - c. The qualifications for the office of deacon are almost as stringent as for pastor because of their public profile in the church and because the servant nature of their work requires strong qualities of maturity and piety.
17. Deacons must be believers worthy of respect, that is, serious believers with dignity, not clowns or buffoons.
- a. They must be sincere, "not double-tongued," in the sense of being honest and unhypocritical.
  - b. Deacons must not be heavy wine drinkers, illicit drug users, adulterers, fornicators, or greedy chasers after dishonest gain.
18. Deacons must be believers of spiritual depth (Acts 6:3).
- a. Specifically they should be believers who understand and hold fast the deep truths of the faith.
  - b. By the phrase with a clear conscience Paul meant that there must be nothing in the conduct of these believers that was glaringly inconsistent with their professed beliefs (1 Tim. 1:5).
  - c. The deacons needed to maintain a good conscience with regard to their behavior as a testimony to the local church members and to the unbelievers, who would not know the secret but could observe the behavior.
  - d. In other words they must not profess one thing but practice another.
  - e. Their behavior should line up with what they profess to believe.



19. Like the overseers, who are to demonstrate their maturity before being placed in a position of responsibility, deacons must also first be tested.
  - a. Paul's intent here was less about formal testing procedure, but rather that these believers "prove" their quality over time in the ordinary activities of life and ministry.
  - b. After they showed themselves "irreproachable," then let them serve as deacons.
  - c. The words if there is nothing against them translate two Greek words, anenkletoi ontes, "being free from accusation" (1 Cor. 1:8; Col. 1:22; 1 Tim. 3:10; Titus 1:6-7).
  - d. It means one who is unaccused, free from any charge at all.
  - e. Christlike conduct is required of deacons (anepilempton, 1 Tim. 3:2.).
20. Similarly the gynaikas ("women" or wives) are to be worthy of respect, that is, dignified, not slanderers (diabolous, from diaballo "to slander"; from this verb comes the noun "devil," the chief slanderer) of others, but temperate (nephaliou, "well-balanced; Titus 2:2), and trustworthy ("faithful") in everything.
  - a. Who are these gynaikas Paul addressed?
  - b. They were almost certainly not the women of the congregation generally.
  - c. They were most likely either the wives of the deacons or a group of female deacons (Phoebe, Rom. 16:1).
  - d. A case can be made for either of these two options.
  - e. But being dogmatic about either view is unwarranted by the exegetical data.
  - f. The qualifications for both sexes were similar.
21. Deacons must be faithful in all things.
  - a. This not only refers to their job as deacons but to all areas of life.
  - b. Like the pastors, deacons must be capable managers of their own families.
  - c. Deacons must be believers of high integrity and high moral character.
22. Though the position of deacon seems by worldly standards to be menial and unattractive, to close followers of Jesus Christ it looks

- quite different (John 13:11-17; Mark 10:42-45).
- a. Those who fulfill their servant roles faithfully gain an excellent standing before fellow Christians who understand and appreciate the beauty of humble, selfless, Christlike service; and great assurance (parresian, "confidence, boldness") in their faith in Christ Jesus.
  - b. Humble service, which lacks all the rewards the world deems important, becomes a true test of one's motives.
  - c. Here one discovers for himself whether or not his efforts are truly prompted by a Christlike spirit of selfless service.
  - d. When a deacon has indeed "served well" his ministry builds confidence in the sincerity of his own faith in Christ and of his unhyphocritical approach to God (Eph. 3:12; Heb. 10:19).
23. The believers responded to the apostles' plan in love and humility (Acts 6:1-7).
- a. Everyone of the seven individuals chosen were Grecian Jews. Their names were Greek, not Jewish.
  - b. The body had been reunited as one in spirit and purpose, worship and ministry.
24. The fact that they were all Grecian believers points toward God moving the church out into the whole world.
- a. Christ had commissioned the first disciples to go into the whole world (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:8).
  - b. He was providentially preparing the church for the day that was soon to come, the day of persecution that would scatter the believers all over the world (Acts 8:1-4).
  - c. These seven individuals, being Grecian ministers, could touch the Gentile world wherever they went by language, by training, and by culture.
  - d. God was preparing the church for the day when they were to be scattered all over the world.
25. Believers must be rooted in love and humility so that God may use them in His eternal plan to reach the world for His Son (Romans 12:5; Gal. 3:28; 2 Cor. 13:11; Ephes. 4:1-3; Phil. 2:2-4).
26. The believers chosen were unknown except for Stephen and Philip (Acts 6:8-15; 8:5-25).
27. Nicolas, a Jewish proselyte, was a Gentile who had been converted

- to Judaism and then to Christ.
- a. Some try to connect him with the Nicolaitans who went off on a doctrinal error and created a sect.
  - b. The likelihood is that he was instrumental in starting the church at Antioch, one of the greatest churches of all time (Acts 11:19-30).
28. Ordination was a specific moment when the newly elected believers were set apart for their ministry.
- a. Before this moment they were not serving in the capacity with which they were now being charged.
  - b. Hereafter, after the ordaining service, they were to minister to the flock of God and meet the flock's day to day temporal needs.
  - c. The church set them before the apostles.
  - d. The apostles led all in prayer.
  - e. The apostles laid their hands upon the newly appointed deacons and commissioned them to serve.
29. Laying On Of Hands was a significant symbol for:
- a. Blessing (Matthew 19:13-15).
  - b. Healing (Mark 5:23; Mark 6:5).
  - c. Imparting the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17-19; Acts 9:6, 17).
  - d. Ordaining and commissioning believers to the ministry (Acts 6:6; 13:2-3; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6).
30. Church.
- a. The Word of God increased.
  - b. The apostles were freed to concentrate on prayer and the Word.
  - c. A great number of priests were being reached for Christ.
  - d. They were obedient in both receiving Christ and in following Christ.
  - e. They embraced the gospel and lived the gospel (Rom. 1:5; Col. 2:6; 1 John 2:6; Gal. 2:20).

### Practice

1. What qualities must a deacon possess?
2. What is required before someone can serve as a deacon?
3. What did the apostles do in response to criticism?

4. Why did the Twelve choose prayer and teaching over caring for the poor?
5. How did the group respond to the apostles' conflict resolution proposal?
6. Who chose the seven candidates?
7. How were the seven candidates given authority to do their task?
8. What was the effect of the appointment of certain people to serve the widows?
9. How did the church fare after the apostles delegated the serving of food to others?
10. How can differences among believers cause friction?
11. What benefits and challenges arise from having different kinds of people in your church?
12. How should we deal with tensions arising from differences between church members?
13. What qualities must Christian leaders have to resolve differences between believers?
14. How could we ensure that no one group of people is neglected?
15. About what do we tend to complain most?
16. How can we learn to channel our complaints into solutions?
17. What sort of person must the spouse of a married deacon be?
18. What do those who serve well gain?
19. Which of the character qualities needed by both overseers and deacons do you think is the most important for a church leader to possess?
20. What is the common ingredient in the lists of qualifications for leaders in the church?