

DEACONS

Understanding the Biblical Call, Mandate and Process of Deacons

Deacons were the first leadership team established in the early church and as such their importance should never be diminished. In Acts chapter six we read about the origins of Deacons, one of whom becomes Christianity's first martyr. They were men of faith, full of the spirit, and some of them performed signs and wonders just like the apostles themselves. Their role was to serve the ministry needs of the body generally and as arbiter when conflict arose.

Unlike the apostles -- or the Shepherd-Elders later -- who devoted themselves to prayer and the study of the Bible, deacons were involved in the daily needs of congregants. In Acts six we see they are responsible for the fair distribution of charitable resources and this, coupled with the requirement they not be greedy (1 Timothy 3.8), indicates that they likely ran the treasury. They were also the first to respond to friction in the body and would strive to resolve all disputes before they became worthy of the attention of other leadership.

Interestingly Paul tells Timothy that one of the results of serving as an elder is that one will become more bold (1 Timothy 3.13). How could one not in light of all they are described as doing in Acts? Stephen would debate Jews about Jesus being the Messiah, and Philip is known for chasing down a chariot so he might tell its occupant about Jesus. Philip also baptizes the charioteer indicating Deacons had spiritual authority. Indeed a deacon, perhaps more than anyone else, would be asked to explain why he spends his time in the service of others. Bold evangelism is the result of such a question and life.

Acts 6.3-6

"But carefully select from among you, brothers, seven men who are **well-attested, full of the Spirit and of wisdom**, whom we may put in charge of this necessary task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

The proposal pleased the entire group, so they chose Stephen, **a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit**, with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a Gentile convert to Judaism from Antioch.

They stood these men before the apostles, who prayed and placed their hands on them.

1 Timothy 3.8-13

Deacons likewise must be **dignified, not two-faced, not given to excessive drinking, not greedy for gain**, holding to the mystery of the faith with a **clear conscience**.

And these also must be tested first and then let them serve as deacons if they are found blameless.

Likewise also their wives must be **dignified, not slanderous, temperate, faithful** in every respect.

Deacons must be **husbands of one wife** and **good managers** of their children and their own households. For those who have served well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

So the twelve called the whole group of the disciples together and said, "It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to wait on tables. But carefully select from among you, brothers, seven men who are well-attested, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this necessary task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." The proposal pleased the entire group...
— ACTS 6.2-5A

The apostles were called to follow Jesus but the deacons were appointed by church body. Examine Acts 6 and follow the wording carefully. The apostles instruct the two arguing factions of widows and the rest of the body to “select from among you” those who will serve as deacons. The only requirements at the time were that the men be full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom. As the church grew, so did the requirements for holding the office. 1 Timothy 3 makes it clear that a deacon is to have dignity, clarity of character, moderate in drinking and spending, and a clear conscience. He must also not have more than one wife, which doesn’t rule out bachelors who have no wife at all. There are also requirements of the family, and for this reason before one accepts the position of deacon they should consult their family, and the entire family should show their support before the body of believers.

It should be noted that unlike other offices in the church, there is no prohibition against women serving in this capacity. Indeed Paul makes mention of Phoebe in his letter to the Romans (16.1). He calls her a “servant of the church in Cenchrea” but the word used for servant in this case is not the word normally used (*doulos*) but instead is *diakonos*, the word for deacon. The same quality of character, relationship to God and wisdom of judgment would apply equally to either sex.

Unlike the apostles or Shepherd-Elders the deacons are to be bold in both the way they minister to the needs of the body and in giving a reason for the hope that they have. There is little use for meekness in this position and should appeal greatly to extroverts who are also humble enough to serve. Their style of ministry is marked with quick understanding and knowledge of proper direction and action. They have the responsibility to assess conflicts in the body and to make judgments regarding the proper course of action. If this does not describe the role of deacon in your church, it may be time to take a look at the Bible to better understand and practice this crucial role in the body.