

## Choosing the Deacon

The word used for *deacon* in the New Testament is **διάκονος**. It comes from the base word *diako*, meaning to run errands. The word is used three different ways in the New Testament.

- 1) A ministry: *1 Corinthians 16:15-16* Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints),<sup>16</sup> that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors.
- 2) A servant: *Romans 16:1-2* I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; <sup>2</sup> that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.
- 3) A leading servant over a ministry: *Philippians 1:1* Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: (note: This is referring to a specific group of people in the leadership role.)

It is in the third definition that we will anchor our discussion. Early on in the first-century the apostles faced a dilemma that threatened the church and met the challenge head-on.

### First Deacons Chosen

*Acts 6:1-5* Now at this time while the disciples were increasing *in number*, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic *Jews* against the *native* Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving *of food*.<sup>2</sup> So 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.”<sup>3</sup> “Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.”<sup>4</sup> “But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”<sup>5</sup> The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch.

There was a problem occurring in the church at Jerusalem. There were many widows in the early church, some Jewish-born and others from the Greek culture that had converted to Judaism. As a result, the daily food ministry was not carried out equally. When the complaint went before the apostles, they were forced to make a decision. They were faced with being distracted from the Prayer and Bible Ministry in order to carry out the Widow’s Ministry. Instead of trying to become micromanagers of all ministries, they chose the first deacons, experienced and proven men, to head up the Widow’s Ministry.

There are many areas of ministry in our congregation that our elders are overseeing. The church is designed to have many ministries in order to reach into the hearts of the members and to the souls of the lost. We actually have so many responsibilities in the church that the elders are about to embark on a search for deacons. They are on a search for men from among us that can serve in the capacity of leading servants of particular ministries. Like the elders of the congregation, the deacons have certain qualities pointed out in the scriptures that must be present in the lives of those that are chosen. This is where you, the congregation, need to provide some input for the

## Choosing the Deacon

elders to make the wisest decision possible. Let us review the scriptural qualities as spelled out in First Timothy.

### 1 Timothy 3:8-13 Qualifications for Deacons

<sup>8</sup>Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. <sup>9</sup>They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. <sup>10</sup>And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. <sup>11</sup>Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. <sup>12</sup>Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. <sup>13</sup>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. (ESV)

### The Qualities Examined

1. “dignity” –holding to high principles, serious
  - 2 Peter 3:17 “...be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness...”
  - 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 But examine everything *carefully*; hold fast to that which is good; <sup>22</sup> abstain from every form of evil.
  - It is crucial that the deacon be a person of high moral character. When a deacon is leading an area of service for the congregation, they must be counted as striving to be pure in the eyes of God. The members need to know that the deacon is leading with integrity. Without it there cannot be good leadership.
2. “not double-tongued” –firm in their word, sincere, not shifty
  - James 1:26 If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his *own* heart, this man’s religion is worthless.
  - James 3:8-10 But no one can tame the tongue; *it is* a restless evil *and* full of deadly poison. <sup>9</sup> With it we bless *our* Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; <sup>10</sup> from the same mouth come *both* blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.
  - When the deacon gives their word that he will get the job done, that word should be carried out. The elders are depending on the deacon to do a good job in ministering to others in the congregation and some of the members of the congregation are dependent on the same.
3. “not addicted to much wine” –not prone to drunkenness, a casual-drinker at most
  - Ephesians 5:18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,
  - Luke 21:34 “Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap...”
  - Isaiah 5:22 Woe to those who are heroes in drinking wine And valiant men in mixing strong drink,

## Choosing the Deacon

- Show me a leader that cannot control his sobriety and I will show you a leader that cannot lead.
4. “not fond of sordid gain” –not engaged in ill-gotten gain or questionable money practices
- 1 Timothy 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.
  - 1 Timothy 6:17-19 Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. <sup>18</sup> *Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, <sup>19</sup> storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.
  - The deacon will often be handling funds, goods and even finances for the different ministries of the church. A reputation of accountability for this is key if they are to be a good leader.
5. “holding to the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience” –faithfully possessing the core faith
- *With a clear conscience they must follow the secret of the faith that God made known to us (NCV).*
  - Jude 3 Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.
  - 1 Timothy 6:12 Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.
  - Col 1:23 “...continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard...”
6. “tested” –to have a proven track record of being a leader in service
- 1 Peter 1:7 so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;
  - Psalm 26:2 Examine me, O LORD, and try me; Test my mind and my heart.
  - It is not enough to define the responsibilities and qualities of a deacon, but there must be a proven track record in which to base it upon. Past performance typically points out possible future success.
7. “Blameless” –without reproach, able to withstand railing accusations
- Philippians 2:14-15 Do all things without grumbling or disputing; <sup>15</sup> so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above

## Choosing the Deacon

reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world,

- Ephesians 1:4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.
- There is something to be said about the deacon that is blameless. We live in a time and place where a mere accusation can damage the man. The deacon who is blameless will always make sure that he lives a life that protects his reputation through good behavior and good decisions.

### 8. Godly Wife

- Dignified –If the wife of a deacon does not live a principled life, she can end up being a ball and chain “hurtmeet” in the ministry.
- Not slanderers -The last thing that a deacon needs is a wife that cannot control her tongue. The wife of a deacon is in the unique position of being damage the good servant leadership of her husband through slander of others in the congregation. She can literally destroy the good work through her negative words.
- Sober-minded -She is to be a level-headed thinker, not given to a drunken mindset.
- Faithful –Without the wife being faithful to the doctrine of the Lord Jesus Christ, her husband will not be able to reach the heights that God has in store for the kingdom.
- This type of woman can propel the ministry of any godly man that serves as a deacon. There is often not enough focus nor credit given to the wives of the deacon.

### 9. Scriptural Marriage

- Matthew 19:5-6 and said, ‘FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH’? <sup>6</sup> “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”
- The marriage relationship of the deacon is crucial in the job that he will do for the Lord. If the marriage relationship of the deacon is not right before God, it could also hinder the work of the church. One less thing on the table to be a distraction.

### 10. Good manager of the home

- Children –you can tell much about a man by the children that are under his leadership. *Ephesians 6:4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*
- The household –often times in the homes of the first-century there were parents, cousins and other relatives under the same roof. The deacon must be a good leader for all the household, generating fit hint he lives of those under his roof.