

# The Office of a Deacon in the Church

## I Timothy 3:8-13

### Introduction:

The church of Jesus Christ has organization on a local level (Acts 14:23; I Pet. 5:2). This organization is comprised of two official offices with its members. Paul addresses the officials in Philippians 1:1 saying, “*Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus that are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.*” The word ‘organization’ is defined as “something comprising elements with varied functions that contribute to the whole and to collective functions; organism” (AHD pg. 876). The ‘elements’ of the Lord’s church are the saints, bishops and deacons. Each of these elements has a function to perform that the work of the church may be accomplished. This lesson shall serve as a reminder as to what the office and function of the deacon is.

### I. What is the deacon?

- A. The words deacon, minister, servant, and administration are found 191 times in the NT of which 91 have the root word *diakon*.
- B. Service is the reoccurring definition of the word. A willingness to serve (not be served) is the key to a successful deacon in the church.
- C. While the root word *diakon* is found a multitude of times in the NT, we find it associated with the office of a deacon only five times (three nouns and two verbs). Notice that the nouns are conjugated as “masculine.” The deacon is to be a male.
  1. “*Deacons (diakonous) in like manner must be grave...*” (I Tim. 3:8). The noun declension “N-A,M-P (Noun-Accusative, **Masculine**-Plural).”
    - a. “A servant, waiting man... a minister of the church, a deacon” (LS 189).
    - b. “One who executes the commands of another; one who by virtue of the office assigned him by the church, cares for the poor and has charge of and distributes the money collected for their use” (Thayer 138).
    - c. “A servant of someone... deacon as an official of the church” (AG 184).
    - d. “A deacon whose official duty was to superintend the alms of the church, with other kindred services” (Moulton 92).
  2. “*Let deacons (diakonois) be husbands of one wife...*” (I Tim. 3:12). Same definition and noun declension as above.
  3. “*Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus that are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons (diakonois)*” (Phil. 1:1).
    - a. The word deacon as used here is defined the same as above and the declension of the noun is “N-DM-P (Noun-Dative, **Masculine**-Plural).”
    - b. Here the word is defined as “one who executes the Commands of another, esp. of a master; a servant, attendant, minister; 1. Univ.: of the servant of a king...” (Thayer 138).
  4. Verb use: “*And let these also first be proved; then let them serve as deacons (diakoneitosa), if they be blameless*” (I Tim. 3:10). The Greek word is defined as “to supply food and the necessaries of life; i.e. to take care of the poor and the sick, who administer the office of deacon in the Christian churches, to serve as deacons” (Thayer 137). See the following passages that will help determine the meaning of the word (Matt. 25:44; Mk. 1:31; Lk. 8:3, 10:40; Jn. 12:2; Acts 6:2; Rom. 15:25; I Pet. 1:12).
  5. Second verb use: “*For they that have served well as deacons (diakonesantes) gain to themselves a good standing, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus*” (I

Tim. 3:13). The word is defined as the same above. It is used in other passages such as Hebrews 6:10, “*for God is not unrighteous to forget your work and the love which ye showed toward his name, in that ye ministered unto the saints, and still do minister.*”

## II. What does the deacon do?

- A. By a thorough investigation of the words above and a study of each context we may clearly define the work of a deacon.
- B. Here is a list of things the deacon will find himself doing. Notice that each of the following scriptures given is not used in the context of the office of a deacon; however, the same Greek words are used to describe the deacon as discussed above. We therefore may conclude, from the use of these words in other settings, that the work of the deacon is:
  1. The deacon serves the congregation spiritually by teaching the gospel (I Cor. 3:5; II Cor. 3:1-11; 6:4; 11:15; Gal. 2:7).
  2. One who executes the commands of another as a lowly servant (Matt. 22:13; 23:11; Mk. 9:35, 10:43; Jn. 2:5, 9). The elders will examine the strengths of each deacon and delegate out work such as ordering teaching material, organizing classes, organizing worship, taping sermons, providing copies of tapes upon request, maintaining a web site and so forth... These are a few of the services performed by the servants (deacons) of the church.
  3. One who supplies food and the necessities of life; i.e. to take care of the poor and the sick (Matt. 25:44; Mk. 1:31; Lk. 8:3, 10:40; Jn. 12:2; Acts 6:2; Rom. 15:25).

## III. Who may be a deacon?

- A. Without even looking at Biblical qualification one may say that a deacon is one who must be willing to serve rather than be served. A deacon is one who is willing and able to teach the gospel. A deacon is one who unselfishly gives of his time to help the needs of the sick and needy saints. Lastly, the deacon is one who has the utmost respect for the elders of the local church and is willing to follow their lead.
- B. The word of God gives qualifications to these men in I Tim. 3:8-13
  1. “*Deacons in like manner must be grave*” (I Tim. 3:8). The words “*must be*” (*dei*) represent binding necessity. No if, ands, or buts about it, the deacon must meet these qualifications. The first qualification is “*grave*” (*semnos*). *Semnos* is defined as “reverend, august, solemn, stately, majestic” (LS 726). This word indicates an air of confidence and not arrogance. This quality is to be the wife of the deacon as well (I Tim. 3:11). Philippians 4:8 uses the term where Paul states, “*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are just (*semnos*), whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*” The deacon is a **just** man and honorable among brethren for his love of the gospel truths and his willingness to handle it aright.
  2. Deacons are not to be “*double-tongued*” (*dilogos*) (I Tim. 3:8). *Dilogos* is defined as “double in speech, saying one thing with one person, another with another with intent to deceive” (Thayer 152).
  3. “*Not given to much wine*” (*me oino pollo prosechontas*) (I Tim. 3:8). The Greek word *prosechontas* is “to turn to or towards a thing... to turn one’s mind to a thing, be intent on it... to devote oneself to a thing... to attach oneself to a thing, cleave to it,... to be held fast by a thing...” (LS 690); and *pollo* is defined as “of anything often repeated; very much too much” (LS 658). Some have concluded that since the elder is not to have any part of intoxicants, (I Tim. 3:3 and Titus 1:7) the deacon can have “not much (a little)” level of intoxicating drink.

- a. In the OT, there are four prohibitions of drinking intoxicants (Lev. 10:9 {priest}; Numb. 6:1-4 {Nazarite}; Prov. 23:31 {a general prohibition to all}; Habakkuk 2:5,15,16 {a general prohibition to all}).
  - b. The NT has prohibitions as well: (I Thess. 5:6; II Tim. 4:5; I Pet. 1:13; 4:7, 5:8).
  - c. A man cannot serve in the office of deacon, much less maintain his Christian fellowship with God, if he “moderately drinks intoxicants.”
  - d. A man can no more moderately drink than he can moderately be double-tongued. He can not moderately drink, any more than one could moderately fornicate. Sin in moderation is foreign to God’s word (cf. Matt. 5:28).
  - e. What then is Paul speaking of here? Historians have recorded that during this day, it was popular to drink very heavily. Whether the drink was grape juice or an intoxicant, people indulged themselves to quench their thirst. Some Romans were known to drink so much grape juice that it caused them to vomit and then they would do it all over again. Gluttony was the order of the day. Paul must be referring to this gluttonous practice here. The deacon would be one attending to the affairs of individuals in their homes who were in need and would have such opportunities to drink heavily.
  - f. Look at the Greek words used in I Tim. 3 (the elder) for “*drinking wine*” and compare it with the Greek words used in I Tim. 3:8 for the deacon. They are two completely different words. In the qualifications of elders, the word “*brawler*” clearly indicates intoxication.
4. “*Not greedy of filthy lucre*” (I Tim. 3:8) is one word in the Greek (*aischrokerdes*). *Aischrokerdes* is defined as “sordidly (filthy, dirty, wretched, base) greedy of gain” (LS 23).
  5. “*Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience*” (I Tim. 3:9). Let us break the sentence down; “*echontas* (“kept with special care, to know, understand... to hold in guard, keep safe, protect” {LS 341}) *to musterion* (“a mystery or secret doctrine; a mystery, a divine secret, something above human intelligence” {LS 423} {cf. Eph. 6:19; Col. 1:26-27}) *tes pisteos* (*indicates that the mystery is the gospel message*) *en kathapa* (“clear from shame or pollution, pure... clear of guilt or defilement, clean, pure” {LS 388}) *suneidesei* (“the faculty of reasoning the distinction between right and wrong...” {AHD 312}). The deacon is one who takes special care to know, understand, and protect the purity of the gospel message that his faculty of reasoning may clearly distinguish between right and wrong.
  6. “*And let these also first be proved; then let them serve as deacons, if they be blameless*” (I Tim. 3:10). To be “*proved*” (*dokimazo*) “to assay or test metals, to see if they be pure... of persons, to put to the test, make trial of, scrutinize... to think fit to do... examination” (LS 208). The one who would serve as deacon must first be examined, put on trial, scrutinized in the area of how they handle the gospel message. If they are found “*blameless*” (*anegkletos*) (“not accused, without reproach, void of offence” {LS 66}) after said scrutinizing then let them serve. The deacon is not one who is placed in the office while the church is exercising longsuffering and patience for them to repent of a particular wrong doing. The deacon is rather a proven man, one who displays a spirit of humility and makes corrections in his life when wrong is committed (I Jn. 3:3).
  7. Paul further states, “*Let deacons be husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well*” (I Tim. 3:12). The inference of this verse is clear and leaves no doubt that the one serving in the office of deacon is to be a man and not a woman.
    - a. “*Husbands of one wife*” (*mias*) [“one” (LS 512); “one in contrast to many... to the exclusion of others” (Vines 809)] *gunaikos handres*). As the elders are to be

husbands of only one wife so are the deacons (cf. I Tim. 3:2). The issue here, as is the case with the elders, is in ruling his house. If a man has had a previous marriage that did not work and is now married again he cannot serve as deacon. The verb “*let*” is present tense indicating ongoing action so that the deacon must remain with one wife.

- b. The deacon is to “*rule*” their house and children “*well*.” To “*rule*” (*proistemi*) is to “be set over, be the chief the head of a party, leader... to govern, direct, manage” (LS 677). The deacon’s rule over his house must be done “*well*” (*kalos*), i.e., “mostly in a moral sense, well, rightly” (LS 397). Paul is saying that the deacon must govern his house using divine instructions as his guide. He is one who loves and honors his wife (Eph. 5:28), teaches the children God’s word (Eph. 6:4), and avoids frustrating the child to the point of provoking to wrath (Eph. 6:4). The family in turn respects the father and is joyfully subject to him (Eph. 5:22; 6:1ff).

#### IV. The deacon’s wife:

- A. The qualifications of the deacon’s wife are addressed in I Tim. 3:11. Paul states, “*Women in like manner must be grave, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things*” (1901 ASV).
- B. NM translates the sentence “*It behoves (their) wives similarly to be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things*” (cf. KJV; NKJV).
  1. The deacon’s wife must be “*grave*” (discussed above as “reverend, august, solemn, stately, majestic”) i.e., confident and serious in the scriptures (LS 726).
  2. The deacons wife must not be “*slanderers*” (*diabolos*) (“slandorous [the utterance of defamatory statements injurious to the reputation or well-being of a person; a malicious statement or report (AHD 1148)], backbiting [“to speak spitefully or slanderously about a person” (AHD 150)] {LS 185}).
  3. Thirdly, the deacon’s wife must be “*temperate*” (*nephaleos*) (“unmixed with wine, wine-less... the offerings to the Eumenides, composed of water, milk, and honey... of persons, sober” (LS 532).
  4. Lastly, the deacon’s wife must be “*faithful in all things.*”

#### Conclusion:

The deacon of the church is an apparent official position with qualifications that must be met. One qualified for such a position in the church will find himself teaching Bible studies, visiting, and providing benevolent care for the sick. The deacon will be loyal and submissive to the elders of the body of Christ in truth. A church organized as God purposed will put forth a united front against error. Unity in the body of Christ will be further solidified with an eldership that is supported by Godly deacons willing to be said servants in the church.

The deacon’s work is not without reward. Paul said, “*For they that have served well as deacons gain to themselves a good standing, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus*” (I Tim. 3:13). The word “*gain*” (*peripoieomai*) means “to keep or save for oneself... to acquire, obtain” (LS 630). That which the deacons acquire is a “*good standing and great boldness in the faith...*” The good “*standing*” (*bathmos*) is “a step, degree” (LS 143). “A step, stair; metaphor. Grade of dignity, degree, rank, standing” (Moulton 64). “Win a good standing (or rank) for oneself” (AG 130). I Timothy 3:13 is the only place in the NT the word *bathmos* is found. This good step, degree, rank, or standing is in “*the faith.*” Clearly the rank obtained in faith is among and recognized by brethren. Secondly, the deacon obtains a “*great boldness in the faith.*” The word “*boldness*” (*parrhesia*) is “freespokenness, openness, frankness” (LS 611). The word boldness is used in the NT to indicate

unashamed clear preaching of the gospel and confidence therein (cf. Jn. 7:26; 16:25, 29; Acts 4:29; 28:31; II Cor. 3:12; Heb. 3:6, 10:35; I Jn. 2:28). Clearly Paul is saying that the grand benefit of being a deacon is having the respect and ear of the brethren. Said condition gives opportunity for open and frank preaching of the gospel that all need to hear. This benefit indicates that the deacon's work is primarily spiritual and secondarily physical. He may not have all answers but he humbly knows where to find spiritual answers. He is one who sets aside humanism and elevates divine revelation to the zenith of his life interest!

A strong church that upholds truth, edifies its members, preaches to the lost, gains numerically, wages war against error and remains impervious to the wiles of the devil is a church that is organized as God would have it.