

1 Timothy

A Call to Faithful Service

Lesson 6

To Timothy,
my true child
in the faith...



In the first seven verses of chapter 3, Paul discusses some of the qualifications or characteristics of those men who serve as elders within the church. Now in verses 8-13, he turns his attention to the deacons.

The Qualifications of Deacons (3:8-13)

The qualifications for those who serve as deacons are in some ways similar to that of the elders, but they are not identical because they serve different roles and need different gifts.



While elders are primarily concerned with the spiritual welfare of the church and are involved in teaching and shepherding, deacons are set apart to take care of physical needs within the church. Both roles are important and necessary in the life of a healthy church.

The word that is translated as “deacon” is the Greek word *diakonos* which can simply be translated as “servant” or “minister.” The word is used over one hundred times in the New Testament, but only three times to refer to the position of deacon within the church.

Deacons are set apart to help meet the physical necessities of church members. God has created each person with both physical and spiritual aspects and it is important for the church to be concerned with both of these needs.

The first men who served as deacons are found in Acts 6. Though the word “deacon” is not used in Acts 6, the responsibilities these men meet and the way they are set apart for this task identifies them filling the role of deacons.

In Acts 6 the number of disciples was increasing and a controversy arose in the church claiming the Hellenistic or Greek speaking Jewish widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. The apostles said, *“It is not right that we should give up preaching the word to serve tables.”*¹ This statement does not infer that the apostles thought this task beneath them nor that it was an unimportant responsibility. What it does show is that in the body of Christ different members have different functions so that the body may operate in a healthy manner.

¹ Acts 6:2

The role of the apostles was teaching and preaching and they could not neglect their primary responsibility. Deacons were needed to take care of a pressing physical need in the church.

1. What detriment might have come to the church if the apostles had neglected their primary role of the ministry of the Word?

The elders asked the brothers in the church to choose to serve in the daily distribution of food. The qualifications for these men were that they be: 1) of good repute; 2) full of the Spirit; 3) and that they possessed wisdom. The church then set apart these men for meeting this important need within the church. The fact that seven were chosen indicates only that this was the number of men needed to accomplish this duty.

2. What detriment might have come to the church had these men not been chosen to serve as deacons?

3. Define the following attributes that a deacon is to possess:

- a. Dignified**
- b. Not double-tongued**
- c. Not addicted to much wine**
- d. Not greedy for dishonest gain**
- e. Holding the mystery of faith with a clear conscience**
- f. Tested**
- g. Blameless**
- h. Husband of one wife**
- i. Managing their children and own households well**

The elders were required to be able to teach, but this qualification is not necessary for deacons. The role of deacons in the church is service, not teaching; however the first deacons included Timothy and Philip who went on to serve as evangelists. We can assume that a man who serves as a deacon might be gifted in such a way that he could become a preacher/evangelist, but this is not necessary to serve as a deacon.



Elders need to be capable of teaching and shepherding because they serve in a leadership capacity tending to the spiritual development of the church. Deacons do not serve in an overseeing or governing role within the church; their role is service and they like other members of the church look to the elders as their overseers and shepherds.

A slightly different wording is used concerning the use of wine for deacons as compared to elders. The language used about an elder drinking wine seems to indicate that he must not drink at all² while the deacon is instructed to not be addicted to much wine. We might logically ask, “Does the Scripture forbid elders from any alcohol while deacons may have a little?”



First, let us say that “addicted” certainly means the deacon cannot be an alcoholic. The Bible frequently and consistently forbids drunkenness and a lack of self-control. Second, the word translated in the ESV as “addicted” means “to pay attention to or to devote oneself to.”³ The idea is that wine cannot be an important part of the life of a deacon.

Not all Christians agree on whether or not Christian leaders may drink alcohol, but abstinence seems to this author to be consistent with Scripture and practical reasoning. While the New Testament may not make a clear prohibition of the consumption of any alcohol for deacons we might ask, “if there is question as to whether or not an elder and/or deacon is permitted to consume any alcohol would it not be more prudent to err on the side of caution?” Similarly if wine is so important to a man that he cannot give it up, doesn’t he violate the instruction to not pay attention to or be devoted to wine?



The husband of one wife is once again listed with the expectation that a deacon will be a “one woman man.” Like the elder, the highest in moral character is demanded for those who will serve as deacons. He cannot be a polygamist or one who is unfaithful to his marriage vows. Also like the elders, he is one who has shown an ability to manage his own household.

4. What qualifications are given for wives of deacons in 3:11?

5. Why was it necessary to list qualifications for the wives of deacons?

The word translated “sober-minded” is used of deacon’s wives just as it had been for elders. This is the Greek word *nēphalios* literally means “somber, temperate, abstinent in respect to wine.”⁴ It is probably true that we should understand this word to more broadly teach a self-controlled lifestyle in all respects and should not related to alcohol alone.

² 1 Timothy 3:3 translated the Greek words *me paraoinon* as “not a drunkard” in the ESV, but is literally translated as “not beside” or “in the presence of wine.”

³ <http://biblehub.com/greek/4337.htm>

⁴ <https://www.teknia.com/greek-dictionary/nephalios>

One of the key concepts in dignified, not slanderers, and faithful show the deacon's wife to be one who is kind to others and is able to control her tongue. The deacon's wives probably accompanied their husbands in visiting and helping those in need. They needed to be trustworthy and spiritual to properly love and support their husbands. Their conduct reflected on the suitability of their husbands to serve as deacons.

Verse 13 describes part of the blessings that come to those who serve as deacons. These men achieve a good standing for themselves both with God and with other Christians. Their work is appreciated and they are respected for what they do. As they serve and continue to grow in their own faith they gain great confidence in Christ.



The responsibilities of deacons are not outlined in 1 Timothy 3, but we can assume as servants who meet physical needs their tasks may be varied. In Acts 6, it was making sure widows were not missed in distribution of food. Today it might be helping a brother or sister repair something in their home, or to change a tyre, or fix a car, to make sure meals are provided to someone who is sick or recovering from illness, or to take the Lord's Supper to a shut in.

Alexander Strauch writes, "The deacons are collectors of funds, distributors of relief, and agents of mercy. They help the poor, the jobless, the sick, the widowed, the elderly, the homeless, the shut-in, the refugees, and the disabled. They counsel and guide people. They visit people in their homes. They relieve suffering. They comfort, protect, and encourage people, and help to meet their needs. In contemporary language, they are the congregation's social workers."⁵

6. List some physical needs that might arise within a church?

Practical Application

1. Elders and deacons compliment one another and are mentioned together in Philippians 1:1. The evangelists and elders have the primary responsibilities to teach, preach, and shepherd. Deacons relieve elders of the important physical needs of the body so they can (like the apostles in Acts 6) give attention to the ministry of the Word and prayer. It is essential that a properly functioning church take care of both spiritual and physical needs.
2. In Acts 6 the apostles saw the need for deacons and instructed the church to choose these men after examining them. Today deacons should be chosen by the church to meet the needs of members when these needs arise.
3. 1 Timothy 3 and Acts 6 gives us instruction about how to examine men so that we might choose those suitable and qualified to serve as deacons when the need for them arises.

⁵ Strauch, Alexander. *The New Testament Deacon*. Lewis and Roth Publishers: Littleton, Colorado, 1992, p. 156.