

PATHWAY COMMUNITY CHURCH

# BIBLICAL ROLE OF DEACONS

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## DEACONS: SERVANTS OF THE CHURCH

### *1 Timothy 3:8-13*

In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.



## WHAT IS A DEACON? *A Biblical Definition*

### ACTS 6:1-6

You will note that the word deacon is not mentioned in this passage. There is a word related to deacon that is used here. It is the word “serve”. In Greek this word is diakonos which means to wait on tables. The word was used more in a sense of function rather than title.

There are two other related words used in the New Testament to refer to deacons:

1. diakonos [a noun meaning servant, minister]
2. diakonia [a noun meaning ministry, service]
3. diakono [a verb meaning to minister or serve]

Word simply means a “servant” or “minister” (used 2 ways in NT):

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The use of the word Deacon in the New Testament comes from three similar Greek words:

*Diakonos* - **servant**

*Diakonia* - **service**

*Diakonew* - **to serve**

They are mentioned 101 times and the vast majority of times these words refer simply to general service. The root idea is to “wait on tables”, like a waiter in a restaurant. John 2 speaks of servants (diakonos) who filled stone water pots with water. In Luke 4, Peter’s mother-in-law arose and began to serve (diakonew) them. Romans 13:4 speaks of those who are “ministers of God to you for good”. In this context the “diakonos” is a civil magistrate, similar to our State soldiers or our policemen. We speak of serving a wonderful meal; taking a car to the service station; joining the military so we can serve our country. This is what the Greek word speaks of -- general service.

Only 2 out of 101 times that the word is used in the New Testament does it refer to

the office of a Deacon (Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8). The million dollar question is “How did the word come to be known as an office in the church?”

Well in order to answer that question, I have to explain the difference between translation and transliteration. Translation is taking a word in one language and explaining its meaning in another (uno, dos, tres = 1, 2, 3).

Transliteration is simply inventing a new word in the English that sounds the same as the word in the first language. Translators recognize in 1 Timothy 3 a word which refers to more than general service. It refers to an office in the church. Thus the translators have invented a new word. They have transliterated “deacon” from diakonos. These are the official servants of the church. They are servants with a capital S; deacons with a capital D -- a specific, recognized group of people who served in an official capacity under the Elders of the local church.



There are three levels of service mentioned in the Bible:

## The Gift of Service

1 Peter 4:10 says “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” All of us who are Christians are deacons with a small d. All believers are called to serve, not just the Elders and Deacons. You are in the ministry, placed in an army under the banner of Christ and enlisted in service for advancement of His kingdom. The New Testament makes no mention of a believer who willfully chooses not to serve. Too often we have servers and spectators. We shouldn’t think in terms of a leadership level (Elders), a serving level (Deacons), and a spectator level (all the rest). Ephesians 4:11-12 says “And He gave some apostles, some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ”.

## Service Required of All Christians

Some are supernaturally gifted by the Holy Spirit to serve. They derive joy and delight in it. Romans 12:7 speaks of the gift of service. Those with this gift enjoy serving behind the scenes, out of the limelight, where not many see or know. We have such in our own church body. You will see these people serving by cooking meals, running the sound board, working on work days, typing and printing the bulletins, and working in the tape and book library.

## The Official Office of Deacon

These previous two levels cover every use of the word in the New Testament except for two. These other two references are translated as “deacon”. Why are there moral qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3 of the Deacons? Because they are the Official Servants who provide a moral example for everyone else to emulate. Why has God set them apart in an official way to do what everybody else does in an ordinary way? Because we all need models to follow. Their example teaches us how we are to live while serving. You see, leaders lead by example. Their lives are to be the embodiment, and the incarnation of the truth.



# What is a Deacon?

As we have seen, they are an official servant in the Church, called by God to provide an example for all the rest to follow.

## Qualifications *1 Timothy 3*

- As with elders, qual. = must be men of good character.
- Note “likewise” (v. 8)--points back to v. 2a.
- The early church used the experience of the plight of the Grecian widows as the beginnings of the ministry of the deacon.
- In this passage we can conclude two things:
  1. A deacon is a servant and a helper of the pastor. He is not a dictator or ruler. A board of deacons is not established to control the church. The deacon is a servant of Christ and His church.
  2. A deacon is elected by the church and not by the apostles [pastors] or by any other group. It is not a political position within the church. The church chooses its deacons from the church body.

### Qualifications in detail:

#### *Character qualifications (8-9):*

- Worthy of respect: “cover term”; of good character.
- Sincere: not “double-tongued”; trustworthy in what one says.
- Not indulging in much- wine: self-controlled.
- Not pursuing dishonest gain: loving money to the point of questionable integrity. (Not driven by money)
- Verse 9: Gospel is a real part of their everyday life.

#### *Practical qualifications (10):*

- Must first be tested: “proven.
- Already showing himself to be a servant of church!

#### *Family qualifications (11-12):*

- Wives of good character (11).
- Husbands of one wife (12a).
- Manage children/household well (12b).



## Deacons & Their Work

### *What is the Function of a Deacon?*

It's important to note that nowhere in the New Testament are we given a job description for him. Evidently, Deacons occupy a very fluid ministry. There are very specific job descriptions for Elders: God has called them to oversee, rule, lead, shepherd, and protect the body of Christ. But what do Deacons do? Very simply, they are to do **anything the elders need them to do!** Right about now you are probably thinking, "Wait a minute! I thought Deacons handled the physical needs of the church and Elders handled the spiritual needs!" Well, let's take a look at it.

In Acts 6, the church is exploding. A conservative estimate is that 20,000 baby Christians have been added to the church since Pentecost. The early church took it upon themselves to feed their widows. But at this point, the non- Palestinian, Greek-speaking Jewish widows are being overlooked in the daily serving of food. This was a major problem! How were they going to deal with it? Acts 6:2-4 reads "and the 12 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. But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.'" The Apostles knew God's call on their lives -- the ministry of the word of God and prayer. That line of demarcation must be protected and they must not misdirect their energies. God had called them to a specific function. They were in danger of getting sucked into other tasks that God had not called them to.

Notice that they were never referred to as Deacons, but always as The 7. In fact, they exercised ministries more like Elders. Philip evangelized, performed miracles, and healed the sick. Stephen preached fearlessly before the Sanhedrin. Both had speaking gifts. One of the distinctions between Elders and Deacons is that Elders must be able to teach, whereas Deacons don't have to. We've assumed these 7 are Deacons. Since they handled physical needs, we assume that's what Deacons do. But wait! They are never called Deacons. Thus, we can't assume Deacons only handle the physical needs of the church.

Thus, we have sought to answer the question, "what is the function of a Deacon?" Our answer is, "to serve the Body of Christ by doing whatever the Elders delegate for them to do". This can be overseeing the women's ministry or men's ministry, providing meals for the sick and needy in the body, building maintenance, overseeing the Sunday school ministry, and so on and so forth.



## **Working Definition**

*“those who share with the elders a concern for the total needs of the congregation, and under the guidance of the elders they aid in relieving those varied needs as able.”*

## **Conclusion**

*Pray for God’s will in the selection and appointment of Deacons here at Pathway Community Church.*

*Aspire to the office of Deacon. There is nothing wrong in desiring the work of a Deacon or Elder as long as your heart’s motivation is right. It is great if you are aspiring for the right reasons. Don’t aspire to the office for personal profit, ambition, recognition or applause, but for the glory of God and the good of His church. 1 Timothy 3:1 says “It is trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.”*

