



HEBRON

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## **WHO ARE DEACONS AND WHAT DO THEY DO?**

### **1 TIMOTHY 3:8-13; ACTS 6:1-7**

**Passage in a Sentence:** When the Church functions as God planned it, the gospel will advance, the community will be blessed, and God will be glorified.

#### **WHO ARE DEACONS? 1 TIMOTHY 3:8-13**

##### **I. WHO DEACONS ARE NOT (3:1-7)**

- a. Elders/Pastors - Key Differences:
  - i. Teaching (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Timothy 3:2, 5:17; Titus 1:9)
  - ii. Leading (Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 3:4-5, 5:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:2)
  
- b. Deacons are not a board from whom elders/pastors have to seek permission/approval.

##### **II. WHO DEACONS ARE (3:8-13)**

- a. Their Character (3:8-9)
  - i. Servants
    1. Deacon = serve (diakonos) – (John 2:5, 9; Romans 15:8; 2 Corinthians 3:6)
    2. Deacon in noun form = servant (diakonia) (Luke 10:40; Acts 6:1, 4)
    3. Deacon in verb form = serve (diakoneo) (Matthew 20:28; Luke 22:26; John 12:26)
    4. Meeting needs (Matthew 4:11, 8:15, 27:55; Luke 8:3, 10:40; John 12:2)
  - ii. Dignified = serious, earnest – not flippant
  - iii. Genuine – authentic – not double-tongued
  - iv. Self-Controlled – content and free (dominated by Spirit)
    1. Wine (to concern oneself with or to give attention to or to turn one's mind toward)
    2. Money
  - v. Christ follower – knows Christ
  - vi. Christ displayer – lives Christ

- b. Their Selection (3:10)
  - i. Tested first
  - ii. Those who prove faithful should be given opportunity to serve
  
- c. Their Homes (3:11-12)
  - i. Wives or Women?
    - 1. Can a woman be a deacon?
      - a. Key issues in support of “woman”
        - i. Likewise forms a new group (3:2; 3:8)
        - ii. Greek word for deacon can be masculine or feminine
        - iii. There is no plural possessive in the original (Greek) text – “Their”.
        - iv. Elders’ wives are not mentioned.
        - v. Since deacons were not the governing body in the church, nor did they do the authoritative teaching – nothing contradicts Paul’s instructions for women in 1 Timothy 2:12.
        - vi. Phoebe (Romans 16:1)
        - vii. There are as many as 17 women mentioned in the New Testament that “served” the church in some way.
      - b. Key Issues in support of “wife”
        - i. “diakonoi” – not used in 11, but is used in 8 and 12.
        - ii. Paul uses “wife” and “women” interchangeably in 1 Timothy (2:9, 10, 11, 12, 14; 3:2, 12; 5:9)
        - iii. Context – right in middle of discussion about male deacons
        - iv. Starts v. 12 w/deacons and does not mention that they are to be the “wife of one husband”
          - 1. Paul never omits this (3:2, 12; 5:9) when referring to positions of ministry or service.
        - v. Why did he not mention elders’ wives?
          - 1. Elders’ wives would not have played a similar role in the elders’ ministry as deacons’ wives play in the ministry of a deacon.
        - vi. If v. 11 addresses women deacons instead of wives, then it fails to list most of the qualifications. (i.e. nothing is said about wine or testing them)
      - c. So why mention wives?
        - i. Partners in ministry
        - ii. Marital fidelity

2. What were they to be like?
  - a. Dignified = serious
  - b. Not slanderers – no malicious gossips
  - c. Sober-minded – temperate/self-controlled
  - d. Faithful – faithful/dependable
- ii. Husband of one wife
  1. Can a single man be a deacon? Having a wife is not a requirement for service.
  2. Can a widower who has remarried be a deacon? Yes.  
(1 Corinthians 7:3-9; Romans 7:1-3)
  3. Can a divorced man who has remarried be a deacon?
    - a. Divorce and marital unfaithfulness (Matthew 19:9)
    - b. Divorce and abandonment by an unbelieving spouse  
(1 Corinthians 7:15)
    - c. Does it mean one marriage?
      - i. Woman at well – 5 marriages (John 4)
      - ii. Widows (1 Timothy 5:9)
      - iii. Marital Faithfulness – Knight: “This statement positively affirms sexual fidelity couched in monogamous marital terminology.”
- iii. Children
  1. A man or woman does not have to have children to be a deacon.
  2. If a man or woman has children, their lives should reflect his or her leadership (taking into consideration that adult children do make their own decisions).
- d. Their Reward (3:13)
  - i. Those who **serve well** . . .
    1. A good standing = step (good reputation amongst the body)
    2. Great confidence in the faith – increased service = increased boldness/confidence

## WHAT DO DEACONS DO? ACTS 6:1-7

### I. IN EVERY CONGREGATION, MINISTRY NEEDS ARISE (6:1)

- a. Their Context:
  - i. Serving, Sacrifice, Suffering and Joy (5:40-42)
  - ii. Growth (2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 9:31; 13:49; 16:5; 19:20)
- b. Their Conflict:
  - i. The Hellenistic widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of supplies.

1. The Hellenists = Greek-speaking Jews
  2. Hebrews = spoke Aramaic and some Hebrew
- ii. Why was taking care of widows a pressing need?  
(Deuteronomy 14:29; 16:11; 24:19-21; 26:12)

**II. WHILE MANY NEEDS ARE PRESSING, THE PRIMARY NEED IS THE WORD OF GOD (6:2)**

- a. The Apostles' primary calling was to make disciples through teaching all that Jesus had commanded (Matthew 28:19-20).
- b. The Apostles were already administering support to the needy (4:34-35).
- c. For the Apostles to deal with this problem, it would have pulled away from their primary responsibility of leading out in prayer and the proclamation of God's Word.
- d. If pastoral time devoted to prayer and proclamation is minimized, then an entire congregation suffers.

**III. THOUGH NOT PRIMARY, PRESSING NEEDS HAVE TO BE ADDRESSED (6:3-6)**

- a. Both needs had to be addressed:
  - i. To neglect the Word would deny the Church of spiritual sustenance.
  - ii. To neglect the widows would harm the reputation of the Church in the lost community.
- b. The Apostles presented a solution that would address both needs and pleased the whole congregation.
- c. These men are never called deacons and there is no indication they were ever appointed to the office of deacon, but they serve as the prerunners to the office. There were needs and there were men who helped meet those needs.
- d. What does any of this have to do with deacons?
  - i. Like the first church, our focus should not be on a specific gifting as much as their character. (Who they are – not just what they can do)
    1. These should be men who love Jesus and display Jesus.
  - ii. Deacons are to be the ones who stand in the gap and support the ministry of prayer and proclamation. Their role is to maximize the elders' opportunity to devote time to their primary calling.
  - iii. As the elders and pastoral staff follow God's leadership to "point B" on the church map, then the deacons are the ones who help get us there. They help in whatever needs arise.
  - iv. Dever: There are 3 aspects of deacon ministry: caring for physical needs, striving for unity of the body, and supporting and encouraging the ministry of the elders.

**IV. WHEN BOTH THE PRIMARY AND PRESSING NEEDS OF A CONGREGATION ARE ADDRESSED, THE WORD OF GOD AND THE NUMBER OF DISCIPLES WILL INCREASE. (6:7)**

- a. In the first church:
  - i. The Word of God continued to increase and spread.
  - ii. The number of disciples multiplied greatly.
  - iii. A great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.
- b. In our church:
  - i. When the church functions as God designed it, then it will be blessed.
  - ii. We must have an emphasis on both the primary and pressing needs.
  - iii. We should feel the freedom to call on deacons to serve in whatever capacities will help the Word of God to increase and spread.

**Prospective Deacons and Areas of Services (these are not exhaustive but just initial suggestions)**

- Deacons of Widows Ministry; Nehemiah Ministry; Prison Visitation; Hospital Visitation; Nursing Homes; Prayer Ministry; Home-bound Ministry; Food Pantry; Disaster Relief; Orphans

**What should we do now:**

- Read and pray through 1 Timothy 3 and Acts 6 over the next few weeks.
- Pray as the Leadership Team drafts proposed bylaws for deacons at Hebron.
- Review the proposed bylaws and attend the member discussion meeting when offered.
- Communicate any questions or suggestions you have with pastoral staff or the Leadership Team.
- If the bylaws are approved then:
  - Ask God to call out men in our church to be deacons.
  - Ask God to show you whom these men are in the Hebron body.
  - Pray for them, and where appropriate, their spouses and children.
  - Do not nominate someone just because they are related to you.
  - Do not just nominate someone whom you think is a deacon – nominate the person that embodies who God says is a deacon.
  - Review the deacon candidate suggestions when provided by the Leadership Team and give any questions or feedback you have about the nominees.
  - These men will be (and should be currently) our lead servants. They will not do all the ministry themselves but will help facilitate our congregation serving in different ministry areas.