

Let Them Serve as Deacons

1 Timothy 3:8-13

Introduction

1. God's design of the church was meticulously and flawlessly thought out in eternity.
 2. His design included organization, which included those who would serve as deacons – **Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8-13**
 3. The work of deacons, as well as their qualifications, must be studied carefully and thoughtfully.
 - a. Much ignorance and confusion exist over this subject which is readily accessible to our minds.
 - b. Rather than speculating, or consulting man's wisdom, we ought to let the plain word of God instruct us.
 4. Deacons are an integral part of a congregation functioning faithfully and effectively as the body of Christ.
- I. The Work of Deacons
- A. Terminology
- a. *Diakonos* – “probably from an obsolete *διάκω diakō* (to run on errands; compare 1377); an attendant, i.e. (genitive case) a waiter (at table or in other menial duties)” (STRONG)
 - i. “primarily denotes a “servant,” whether as doing servile work, or as an attendant rendering free service, without particular reference to its character.” (VINE)
 1. **Descriptive of the work – sailors sail, drivers drive, etc.**
 2. **“let them serve as deacons (*diakoneō, verb*)” (1 Timothy 3:10) – deacons serve as deacons, servants serve.**
 3. **It is a work – there is an activity of service being filled by such a one. (Not an honorary title, though an honorable work.)**
 - ii. **Christ** as a *diakonos* – **Romans 15:8**
 - iii. **Apostles** as *diakonos* – **Mark 9:35**
 - iv. **Evangelists** as *diakonos* – **Ephesians 6:21**
 - v. **Disciples** as *diakonos* – **John 12:26**
 - vi. **Civil Authorities** as *diakonos* – **Romans 13:4**
 - b. **In an official sense – Philippians 1:1**
 - i. “(1) generally of a person who renders helpful service servant, helper (MT 20.26; possibly RO 16.1); (2) as an official in the church; deacon,” (ALGNT)
 1. **Qualifications imply the official sense – Acts 6:3; 1 Timothy 3:8-13**
 - ii. “one who gets someth. done, at the behest of a superior, assistant to someone” (BDAG)
 - iii. **Deacons in Jerusalem – Acts 6:1-6** – under apostles.
 1. Not officially called deacons, but doing a deacon's work.

2. **“distribution” (v. 1)** – *diakonia*; **“serve” (v. 2, verb)** – *diakoneō*; **“this business”** – in reference to the work of service in context.
 - a. If they participate in the *diakonia* by taking the action of *diakoneō* then they are rightly called *diakonos*.
 - iv. **Deacons in Philippi** – **Philippians 1:1** – under elders.
 - v. **Deacons in Ephesus** – **1 Timothy 3:8-13** – under elders.
 - vi. **The term implicitly includes concepts such as:**
 1. **Humility, willingness, dependability, diligence, flexibility, faithfulness, self-denial, etc.**
- B. What the Work is Not
- a. **The work of preaching/teaching (evangelists):**
 - i. **Acts 6:2, 4** – distinguishes the work of deacons from the work of preaching and teaching.
 - ii. The distinction is like that of an elder and a preacher – **1 Timothy 5:17** – an elder is not a preacher and a preacher is not an elder, but a man can carry the work of both an elder and a preacher (as he meets the qualifications).
 - iii. **Acts 6:5, 8, 10; 8:4-5; 21:8** – Stephen and Philip were of the 7 men chosen, and they both gave themselves to the specific ministry of preaching.
 1. They were serving as deacons, and then when they were preaching, they were serving as preachers.
 - b. **The work of oversight/shepherding (elders):**
 - i. “one who executes the commands of another, esp. of a master, a servant, attendant, minister” (THAYER)
 1. **In the context of deacons in the official capacity, they are always executing the commands of an authority figure, not wielding any authority themselves.**
 2. **Acts 6:2 (“the twelve,” apostles); 1 Timothy 3:1, 8 (“bishop”); Philippians 1:1 (“bishops and deacons”)**
 - ii. Terminologically, there is nothing concerning oversight or rule with deacons.
 1. In fact, the opposite is the case – they are the ones who are given commands, and their work monitored and overseen.
 - iii. **Misconception** – *elders oversee the spiritual work, and deacons oversee the physical work:*
 1. There is no command/direct statement, approved example, or necessary implication that lends credence to any part of this idea.
 2. **Elders – 1 Peter 5:2-3** – **“flock...among you...those entrusted to you”** include the deacons.

3. **“whom we may appoint over this business” (Acts 6:3)** – they are appointed to a specific work by those in authority, not to oversee it themselves as others get it done, but to do the work as deacons.
4. **DEACONS ARE NOT DELEGATORS, BUT THEY ARE THE DELEGATES OF THE ELDERS.**
5. **The oversight of elders is complete, including the physical – Acts 11:29-30 – “sent it to the elders”**

C. The Work

- a. The only place where the official work of deacons is displayed in the New Testament is in **Acts 6:1-7** – the text gives insight into the general work of deacons in addition to the specific circumstance within the context.
- b. To **“serve tables” (v. 2)**
 - i. **(v. 1) – “daily distribution”** – cf. **Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-35** – the treasury of the Jerusalem church used for the work of benevolence.
 1. **Needy saints** – widows.
 2. **Problem** – **“neglected”** – with such a great number, it is easy to understand how some might be overlooked.
 3. **(v. 2) – “the twelve”** were the ones given to this particular work of distributing as any had need (**cf. Acts 4:35**).
 - ii. **(vv. 2-3)** – they appointed other men to the **“business”** – *chreia* – “an activity that is needed, office, duty, service” (BDAG)
 1. The idea of NEED, LACKING NEED, is inherent within the concept.
 2. It wasn’t unimportant, but not most important – it was a work/service that needed to be executed.
 - iii. **“tables”** – that which food sat upon to be served, that which money sat upon for exchange purposes (moneychangers).
 1. Generally, this represents physical matters of necessity.
 2. To **“serve tables”** should be taken in the sense of executing tasks of a physical nature directed by those in authority in service of others.
- c. **Generally – ANY work needing to be done, specially set apart and assigned by the elders to the deacons.**
 - i. Not oversight of work, but the work itself.
 - ii. The elders always oversee these tasks.

D. The Importance of the Work

- a. The importance of the work is observed in the fact that deacons and their work is a product of the mind of God – **Ephesians 3:10-11; Philippians 1:1**
 - i. **Acts 6:1-4** – the apostles were confronted with a problem and set in motion a solution in appointing men to the work – this was under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

- ii. “Doubtless the need for such an arrangement was foreseen by the head of the church and by the Holy Spirit dwelling in the apostles; but this foresight was not given to the apostles, nor were they moved to make the arrangement until the need for it was manifest to them and to the whole church. Thus the Spirit guided them into additional truth as additional truth was needed.”
(McGarvey, J.W., *New Commentary on Acts of the Apostles*, 104)
 - iii. Compare – **Genesis 2:18** – God knew this about man, but to give man a greater understanding of the need for woman, He created thus.
- b. The work relieves others to execute more important spiritual work:
- i. **Apostles** – **Acts 6:2, 4** – the implication is that they were currently serving tables, and that was taking time away from the ministry of the word.
 - ii. **Elders** – **Acts 20:28-31; 1 Peter 5:1-5** – elders must oversee, feed, protect, and lead the flock – teaching, discipline, exhortation, direction, etc. – if they are tasked with all the physical, menial matters their work will be neglected, and the greatest needs of the congregation will not be sufficiently met.
 - iii. **Preachers** – **1 Timothy 4:12-16** – the specific activity of the evangelist is in study of God’s word, and preparation to communicate that to others – if he is tasked will all the physical matters he has less time for this.
- c. Through the relief provided, and the physical needs in the backdrop of spiritual work being met, the word of God is furthered:
- i. **Acts 6:2, 4, 7** – the record reflects a direct connection between the relief provided by the service of these men, and the progress of the word.
 - ii. **Anything necessary for the work of the church to be carried out is assigned to deacons by the elders to ensure the efficient execution of the Lord’s will – Evangelism, Edification, Benevolence:**
 - 1. **Cf. 1 Corinthians 14:40** – this is accomplished in part by the activity of the deacons.
 - 2. **Evangelism** – tracts, website, social media, advertisements, organize outreach projects (door knocking, online curriculum, correspondence courses, etc.), visitors, etc.
 - 3. **Edification** – class curriculum, class teachers, library, materials, group bible studies, worship assignments, worship order, Lord’s Supper prep, etc.
 - a. **Place of Assembly** – cleanliness, preparation, powerpoint, baptistry, parking lot, security, etc.
 - 4. **Benevolence** – visitation, distribution to needy saints, etc.

- a. **Funds** – counting money, depositing money, assisting elders with budget, paying bills, etc.
 5. The general nature of the deacons' work, and the authority of the elders to assign activity includes many possible matters.
 6. **In all this work, the elders are the overseers, and the deacons are the ones executing the orders – they do not wield authority but are those put to work by authority.**
- II. The Qualifications of Deacons
- A. Spiritual
 - a. **Full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3)** – i.e. the influence of the Spirit through the word of God – **Ephesians 5:18; Colossians 3:16; Galatians 5:22-23**
 - b. **Full of Wisdom (Acts 6:3)** – he is prudent, equipped with discernment to apply the knowledge of God's will to any given situation, mature – **James 1:5; 3:13, 17-18**
 - c. **Holding the Mystery of the Faith with a Pure Conscience (1 Timothy 3:9)**
 - i. The mystery of the faith – i.e. the gospel – **1 Timothy 3:16; Jude 3**
 - ii. Holding – *echō* – “literally and figuratively, as holding something safely keep, preserve” (ALGNT)
 - iii. Pure Conscience (with a) – i.e. not merely holding it intellectually, but practically, faithfully, with sincere adherence, and full devotion – without hypocrisy. (**cf. 1 Timothy 1:19**)
 - B. Character
 - a. **Of Good Reputation (Acts 6:3)** – in the congregation (**“from among you”**) and community (**cf. 1 Timothy 3:7**).
 - b. **Reverent (1 Timothy 3:8)** – *semnos* – “of persons, that which in a human being calls forth veneration and respect from others honorable, of good character, worthy of respect” (ALGNT)
 - i. **“men of dignity” (NASB); “dignified” (ESV); “grave” (KJV); “serious” (RSV)**
 - ii. He must be respectable, serious, and of honorable character.
 - c. **Not Double-Tongued (1 Timothy 3:8)** – dishonest, insincere, hypocritical, deceitful. (**cf. Acts 5:1-11** – Ananias and Sapphira were double-tongued – one can imagine why such a character would be unfit to serve as a deacon).
 - d. **Not Given to Much Wine (1 Timothy 3:8)** – Christians are not to be given to intoxicants – **1 Peter 4:3**
 - i. Rather – **Ephesians 5:18** – filled with Spirit.
 - ii. **“Much”** prohibits drunkenness, but in no way PERMITS moderation – **cf. James 1:21**
 - iii. Elders **“not given to wine” (v. 3)**, but deacons can have a little? – No, **cf. Hebrews 13:7** – follow their faith.
 - e. **Not Greedy for Money (1 Timothy 3:8)** – as those who will be dealing with money, or things of physical value, they must be trustworthy.

- i. **Cf. 1 Timothy 6:9-10** – such greed leads one into many temptations and sins.
 - f. **Tested (1 Timothy 3:10)** – i.e. proven before (**"first"**) being appointed to the office and work of a deacon.
 - i. This implies time and activity.
 - ii. This implies evaluation that reaches the conclusion that they are proven – **cf. Acts 6:3, 5**
 - g. **Blameless (1 Timothy 3:10)** – not perfect, rather, no accusation can be sustained against them.
 - C. Domestic
 - a. **Husband of One Wife (1 Timothy 3:12)** – male, not polygamous, not adulterous, but faithfully married.
 - b. **Ruling Children and Own Houses Well (1 Timothy 3:12)** – he must be a father, and one who presides over his household well.
 - i. **Treatment of wife – Ephesians 5:25-33** (leadership that serves and loves); **1 Peter 3:7** (understanding, honor)
 - ii. **Treatment of children – Colossians 3:21** (not provoking); **Ephesians 6:4** (training, discipline)
 - iii. **Treatment of bondservants – Colossians 4:1** (just and fair)
 - iv. **Not just ruling, BUT RULING WELL** – using authority in effective servitude. (**cf. Mark 10:42-45**)
 - c. **Deacons' Wives (1 Timothy 3:11)**:
 - i. **Reverent** – same as deacons, worthy of respect, dignified, etc.
 - ii. **Not Slanderers** – they cannot be given to gossip, baseless accusations, and abusive, injurious speech while their husbands are at work serving those they slander.
 - iii. **Temperate** – sober, not intoxicated, self-controlled.
 - iv. **Faithful in All Things** – i.e. entirely trustworthy.
 - D. NOTE: These are not simply men skilled at some physical labor that will do the job, but they are conscientious, devoted men of faith who love the Lord and His kingdom, and have proven themselves to be spiritually minded servants, first of God, and then of His people.
 - a. The standards and qualifications for deacons must not be lowered by a mistaken view of the work.
 - b. God does not say anyone can do it!
- III. The Exhortation for Deacons (**1 Timothy 3:13**)
 - A. **"For those who have served well..."**
 - a. Paul gives encouragement to the deacons currently serving, but also encouragement for others to serve.
 - b. There are good reasons to desire to serve, and continue to serve, and Paul mentions two.
 - B. Obtain a Good Standing
 - a. Before God and the brethren.
 - b. Such is an honorable, and important work.

- c. This assured result of those who serve well reflects on the estimation of service in the eyes of Jesus – **“whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant” (Mark 10:43).**
 - i. This is the correct kind of ambition.
 - ii. It is not selfish to seek a work that makes you pleasing to God.
- C. Obtain Great Boldness in the Faith
 - a. **Boldness** – *parrēsia*; from 3956 and a derivative of 4483; all out-spokenness, i.e. frankness, bluntness, publicity; by implication, assurance: (STRONG) (“confidence,” NASB, ESV)
 - b. When a spiritual work is faithfully pursued, and executed well, there is a great confidence afforded such a one by the grace of God – going forward, he is supplied more so with the concept voiced by the apostle Paul – **cf. Philippians 4:13**
 - c. Also, because he has faithfully executed God’s will with a servant’s spirit, he is granted greater boldness/outspokenness in conveying the gospel to others – His conviction is intensified with participation.

Conclusion

1. Deacons fill a working role that is indispensable in the church.
2. Faithful men ought to be cultivated and sought to supply the church with this great need.
3. These men ought to understand the weight that comes with the work and avoid downplaying it as merely a list of chores – the qualifications are spiritual, and the work, though physical, serves the spiritual.
4. Let us thank God for deacons and encourage these men to serve faithfully.