

Having considered the identity of church officers we began last week to consider their responsibilities—if you recall we summarized the duties of elders by three key words, ministering, overseeing, and leading—[1] elders minister the word of God, Jer.3:15—“and I will give you shepherds according to my heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding...”, [2] oversee the flock of God, 1Pet.5:2—“shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers...”, and [3] lead the church of God, Heb.13:17—“obey those who rule over you, and be submissive...”—thus it’s my desire this evening to come back to the responsibilities of officers, considering specific duties of deacons...

Now at the very outset I must confess that the Scriptures have much less to say concerning deacons than it does elders—and yet as we shall soon see there are sufficient material to steer us clear of two common errors with reference to the diaconate—[1] there are those who place too much authority with deacons—in some places the Deacon Board possesses more authority and influence within the church than does the elders—in fact oftentimes the government of the church is reduced to a single pastor and a Deacon Board—the latter controlling the former—but as we shall see this flips the Biblical pattern on its head—for deacons are given no authority over the elders but are merely supportive of them...

But a [2] and equally dysfunctional view is to give little or no place to the diaconate—and what happens here is that the pastor is responsible to make every decision from the color of carpet to the length of the curtains—but this too, as we shall see tonight, is a denial of the Biblical evidence—for such things [while in no way being beneath the office of elder], are not to be his primary concern or focus...

- I. The reality of deacons
- II. The duties of deacons
- III. Lessons from deacons

I. The reality of deacons

1. Here I simply want to begin by establishing the reality of a distinct office called deacon—there are two places where the term “deacon” as a noun is applied to an office...
2. Phil.1:1—“Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons...”
3. Here we find certain persons within the church of Philippi described as bishops and deacons—bishops [overseers] and deacons...
4. 1Tim.3:1—“this is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position [office] of a bishop, he desires a good work...”
5. Notice v8—“Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money...” notice also v12—“let deacons be...”—in both v8 and 12, we find the word “deacon” used in the noun form...
6. We find it used two times as a verb, both in v10 and v13, the NKJV translates it—“let them serve as deacons...”
7. The KJV renders this single word—“let them use the office of a deacon...” (v10), and “they have used the office of a deacon...” (v13)...
8. Now to be honest I can not explain to you why they translated this word in this way, I only want to point this out to...
9. Thus it’s important to underscore at the outset, that the NT Scriptures use this word [in it’s noun form] as a unique and individual office...

II. The duties of deacons

A. Gleaned from the name of the office

1. If you remember last week I suggested that we can glean much of the responsibilities of elders from the title shepherd, so we can do likewise with the name “deacon...”
2. The Greek word is *diakonos* which literally means “servant”—in fact it’s translated that way some 20 times throughout our NT...
3. For example, Matt.23:11—“but he who is greatest among you shall be your servant [lit. shall be your diakonos]...”
4. But this word is also translated minister with the idea of serving, in fact it’s oftentimes applied to ministers of the gospel...
5. For example, 1Tim.4:6—“if you instruct the brethren in these things you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ [a good diakonos]...”
6. Thus both officers within the church are servants—elders are to serve the people concerning their spiritual needs deacons their physically needs...
7. But more directly to our present purposes, we learn from the term Deacon, that fundamentally such persons are servants...
8. Who they serve and in what way they serve isn’t here stated—that will have to be gleaned from another text—to which we now turn...

B. Gleaned from the origin of the office

1. Here I refer to Acts 6:1-4—“now in those days, when *the number of* the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. 2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. 3 "Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; 4 "but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word...”
2. Due to the fact that the church in Jerusalem was growing numerically, and that within this church there was a diversity of ethnic origin, there arose a complaint...
3. We read in v1—“there arose a complaint against the Hebrews [Hebrew speaking Jews] by the Hellenists [Greek speaking Jews]...”
4. The Hellenists [Greek speaking Jews] thought that their widows were being overlooked—“in the daily distribution...”
5. Thus the 12 apostles instructed the people to choose 7 men from among themselves—men full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit—who may be appointed over such things...
6. Now before I suggest several things within the passage as it has bearing upon the office and responsibilities of deacons, let me first justify my assertion that we here have the origin of the diaconate...
7. It is at times pointed out that nowhere within this passage are these seven men actually referred to as deacons...
8. Notice [1] an argument from church history—here I mean that without little exception the church has always understood this passage as the origin of the diaconate...
9. For example, Calvin wrote in his Institutes—“Scripture specifically designates as deacons those whom the church has appointed to distribute alms and take care of the poor, and serve as stewards of the common chest of the poor. Their origin, institution, and office are described by Luke in Acts 6:3. For when the Greeks started a rumor that their widows were being neglected in the relief of the poor, the apostles, making the excuse that they were unable to fulfill both functions (preaching the Word and serving at tables), asked the multitude to choose seven upright men to whom they might entrust this task. Here, then, is the kind of deacons the apostolic church had, and which we, after their example, should have...”
10. Notice [2] an argument from necessity—by this I mean, if this passage does not describe the fundamental responsibilities of deacons then we are left virtually clueless with reference to these duties...
11. John Angell James—“If this be not the origin of the deacon’s office, where shall we find the account...where shall we find this but in Acts 6...”
12. Then when we come to 1Tim.3 where we find the qualifications of deacons, the apostle speaks in such a way as to imply a prior knowledge of the office...
13. Notice [3] an argument from the text itself—I think even a surface reading of this passage would provide us with ample reasons to see here the beginning of an official office...

14. Notice v3—“therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business...”
15. Here we find several things that will be useful to us when, in a later study, consider the ordination of officers...
16. Notice they were mature believers taken from the church—“seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom...”
17. Having chosen seven men in v5, we read in v6—“whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them...”
18. This is akin to 1Tim.4:14 where we find that Timothy had been set aside—“with the laying on of the hands of the eldership...”
19. Accordingly, I assert that while the actual noun “deacon” is not applied to these men, the overwhelming evidence confirms that we here find the origin of the deaconate...
20. Thus here I want to summarize three things with reference to the office of deacon—[1] the primary purpose of deacons is to liberate elders from serving tables, v2b—“it is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables...”
21. The primary purpose of deacons is to ensure that elders have the needed time to labor in the word and in doctrine...
22. Now this in no way implies that the apostles thought themselves above waiting on tables, for the implication is that prior to this account they did just that...
23. But they are simply making the point that it was not “agreeable to sound wisdom” to take them from laboring in word and doctrine to perform some of the more mundane tasks in the church...
24. Notice v4—“but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry [serving] of the word...”—thus it wasn’t that they were apposed to serving, but they merely wanted to direct their serving in another direction...
25. Thus it’s vitally important to note, that the office of deacon, specifically arose for the purpose of freeing the apostles to labor in word and doctrine...
26. John Gill—“the care of the poor had begun to take up more of their time, than the work of the ministry...and therefore they thought it not right and proper, or so suitable a thing to God and man, that they should in the least neglect a work of so great importance to the souls of men, and cause it to give way to that which only regarded their bodies...”
27. Notice [2] the primary duty of deacons is the material needs of the church, v2b—“it is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables...”
28. The Greek word translated “serve” is the verb form of the noun *diakonos*, thus the phrase “serve tables” does well to summarize the primary responsibility of a deacon...
29. Fundamentally and primarily deacons are given to serve tables—that is, to care for and oversee the material needs of the church...
30. Thus such things as the financial and material oversight of the church, is the primary responsibility of deacons...
31. Philip Ryken—“The election of the first deacons explains the primary difference between elders and deacons. There is a practical division of labor between the only two ordained offices in the church of Jesus Christ. Like the apostles, elders devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. They labor in the spiritual work of intercession and proclamation. Meanwhile, as their title indicates, deacons serve. They take care of people’s material needs in a spiritual way...”
32. Now it’s at this point that it becomes necessary to expand upon this concept to fit our present needs as a church...
33. For example, not only the financial oversight, but upkeep of the building and grounds would fall beneath the general responsibilities of the deacon...
34. Such things as ensuring that the steps are cleared from snow and salted on wintery days—bathrooms need to be cleansed and well stocked and the grass needs mowing during the summertime...
35. All of these tasks neatly fall beneath the general responsibilities of the deaconate—does this mean that deacons have to personally perform such things...
36. No—of course not—in fact, most of know that many of these very things are performed within our church by persons other than deacons...

37. For example, when I came to church this morning, Mr. Rosenberger was shoveling the snow and adding salt to the steps...
38. Do you remember 1Pet.4:10-11—“as each one has received a gift, minister it to one another...if anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone serves, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ...”
39. But ideally, such things should fall beneath the general oversight of the deacons, as Mr. Rosenberger ought to work closely with the deacons...
40. Now for us, we presently have two deacons and the responsibilities are loosely divided between the finances and building upkeep...
41. Mike Spickard is generally in charge of overseeing the finances and Mr. Spickard is generally in charge of building upkeep—both are in charge of administering benevolence as needed...
42. Notice [3] the authority given deacons is subordinate to elders—notice the latter part of v3—“whom we may appoint over this business...”
43. The NAS has it—“whom we may put in charge of this task...”—the point being, deacons possess a qualified authority beneath the elders to fulfill their assigned tasks...
44. Accordingly, I think it’s reasonable to assume that these seven men [as identified in v5], had helpers beneath them in waiting upon the widows...
45. Turn back to 1Tim.3:4—“one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God)...”
46. Notice v12—“let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well...”—while both must have their houses in order only elders rule in the church...
47. Thus, as officers within the church deacons possess a measure of qualified authority, they are not rulers in the same way as elders...
48. John Gill—“we read of ruling elders, but never of ruling deacons...deacons may and should be assisting to pastors or elders in the care of the church...”
49. Wayne Grudem—“It is significant that nowhere in the New Testament do deacons have ruling authority over the church as the elders do, nor are deacons ever required to be able to teach Scripture or sound doctrine...”

III. Lessons from deacons

A. The office of the deaconate underscores the centrality of the Word

1. By this I merely want to underscore that primarily the office of deacon is designed to liberate elders to labor in word and doctrine...
2. Why should we be concerned about mundane and practical things such as the ordering of the finances and the upkeep of the building, but because we are all working together with the hope that the gospel would be advanced...
3. Notice v7—“then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplies greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith...”
4. My point being—while elders and deacons have different functions within the church they possess a common goal for the church...

B. The office of the deaconate underscores the importance of serving

1. I think it’s important to keep in mind, that essential to the only two remaining offices in the church is the concept of servitude...
2. Elders are ministers who serve the people with the word of God, while deacons primarily minister or serve the people with reference to their physical and material needs...
3. Thus I suggest that essential to the very heart of true religion is the idea or concept of serving—humble, selfless servitude...
4. And so within each deacon we behold an embodiment of Mk.9:35—“If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant [*diakonos*] of all...”

5. Thus I suggest that every single person within this church is to be a deacon in the broader sense of the word...
- C. The office of the deaconate underscores the two-fold need of man
1. Some of us may be surprised to know just how concerned God is with the widow, poor, and needy, and the office of deacon is a testimony to this concern...
 2. While the Scriptures make clear that spiritual things are more important than physical—we mustn't forget that Christ's redemption concerns the whole man—body and soul...
 3. Furthermore, we mustn't overlook the fact that the office of deacon was originally begun that widows would have their physical needs cared for...
 4. Thus first and foremostly the office of the deaconate reminds us that God has a special concern for the poor and needy...
 5. Jas.1:27—"pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world..."
 6. Now this necessarily means that the church must have a concern for the physical, financial, and material needs of those within and without of the church...
- D. The office of the deaconate underscores the essence of the gospel
1. Here I simply want to repeat something I said at the outset of this series—that in Christ we have the perfect fulfillment of the offices of elder and deacon...
 2. Thus there is a true sense that in the office of the deaconate we find a shadow of the very heart of the gospel of Christ—the heart of a servant...
 3. Rom.15:8-9—"now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant [*diakonos*] to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: For this reason I will confess to you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name..."
 4. In other words Christ came to serve a people comprised of both Jews and Gentiles, Matt.20:28—"just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many..."