

THE MINISTRY OF DEACONS

3. HOW ARE DEACONS DIFFERENT FROM THE ELDERS?

- i. **DEACONS ARE NOT REQUIRED TO LEAD OR TO OVERSEE THE CHURCH, LIKE THE ELDERS.**

Deacons are not told to shepherd God's church as elders are exhorted in Acts 20:28,

- ❖ "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood."

Wayne Grudem: It is significant that nowhere in the New Testament do deacons have ruling authority over the church as the elders do. [*Systematic Theology*, pg. 920]

Note: In the Jerusalem council, the apostles and elders came together to discuss about the matter of circumcision. Deacons are not mentioned.

- ❖ Acts 15:6, The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter.

Deacons are not accountable for the souls as the elders are:

- ❖ **Hebrews 13:17**, Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Observation: Elders managing their household:

- ❖ **1 Timothy 3:4**, "He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?"

Deacons managing their household:

- ❖ **1 Timothy 3:12**, “Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.” (how will he care for God’s church is omitted because deacons are not in a leading position)

ii. **DEACONS ARE NOT REQUIRED TO GIVE AUTHORITATIVE TEACHING, LIKE THE ELDERS.**

- Deacons are not told to have the ability to teach as elders are required to be “able to teach.”

- ❖ **1 Timothy 3:2**, “able to teach”

- ❖ **Titus 1:9**, “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”

- ❖ **1 Timothy 3:8-13**, teaching is NOT mentioned in the qualifications of deacons.

D A Carson: Deacons were responsible to serve the church in a variety of subsidiary roles, but enjoyed no church-recognized teaching authority akin to that of elders. [*Authority in the Church*, pg. 229]

iii. **DEACONS ARE NOT REQUIRED TO RECEIVE FINANCIAL SUPPORT LIKE SOME (NOT ALL) ELDERS WHO LABOR IN PREACHING AND TEACHING.**

- ❖ **1 Timothy 5:17-18**, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.”

Note: This does not mean they are not *permitted* to teach if they are qualified or to receive financial support if they are needy.

4. WHAT ARE THE QUALIFICATIONS OF DEACONS?

❖ **1 Timothy 3:8-13**, Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Observation: There is no mention of deacons' qualifications in Titus. 1 Timothy 3:8-13 is the only Scripture reference for the qualification of deacons. NINE QUALIFICATIONS ARE MENTIONED.

i. Deacons must be dignified [*semnos*], v. 8

- Respectable reputation (honored and respected by people in the church). [Not perfect]
- This means they must be good in interpersonal relationships and members must be able to cooperate with them in their delegation of work.

ii. Deacons must not be double-tongued [*dilogos*], v. 8

Deacons are in constant interaction with people in organizing things. They will observe all kinds of people.

- Say one thing and mean another (grumble)—not truthful
- Not confidential
- Saying one thing to certain people but something else to others. [Gossip]
 - **Kent Hughes:** Flattery is saying to someone's face what you wouldn't say behind their back, whereas gossip is saying behind someone's back what you wouldn't say to their face.

iii. Deacons must not be addicted to much wine, v. 8

- Addiction to wine leads to lack of sound mind and inappropriate behavior, which disqualifies a person from becoming a deacon.

Observe, it does not say he must not drink wine; it says that he should not be addicted to wine.

John Piper, “By imposing a restriction which the New Testament never imposes, this . . . requirement, in principle, involved us in a legalism.”

But there is a reason to consider not drinking wine at all: “It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.” (Rom. 14:21)

iv. Deacons must not be greedy for dishonest gain, v. 8

Deacons handle money. Love for money distorts a person’s ethical behavior in financial matters. A greedy person is disqualified to serve the church.

- Does he return the leftover money?
- Does he misuse the church’s money?
- Does he maintain accounts appropriately?
- Does he use the church’s money for personal use and later adjust it?

v. Deacons must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience, v. 9

- Sound in their faith in biblical gospel
- “With a clear conscience” speaks about behavior being consistent with beliefs.

William D Mounce, “It is not sufficient to have a grasp on the theological profession of the church; that knowledge must be accompanied with the appropriate behavior, in this case a conscience that is clear from any stain of sin.”

vi. Deacons must be tested first, then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless, v. 10

- A testimony above reproach. Test them according to the given qualifications.

Benjamin L Merkle [associate professor of New Testament and Greek]: “Although Paul does not specify what type of testing is to take place, at a minimum, the candidate’s personal background, reputation, and theological positions should be examined.

But not only should the moral, spiritual, and doctrinal aspects be tested, the congregation also must consider the person’s actual service in the church. **A person with a deacon’s heart is one who looks for opportunities to serve.** As a person is given more responsibilities in the church, his ability to serve in a responsible manner and his ability to relate to others should be examined. Allowing someone who has not been tested to become a deacon can later lead to many problems.”

vii. [Deacons] Their wives likewise must be dignified [respectable], not slanderers [double tongued, gossip], but sober-minded [addicted to wine, sobriety/stable mind], faithful in all things [trustworthy], v. 11

viii. Deacons must be the husband of one wife, 12

Literally, it means, “one-woman man.” It is being devoted to his wife alone.

It is not just not having more than one wife (polygamy); essentially, it is being faithful to his wife.

It is not burning with lustful desires for other women and keeping himself away from all emotional and physical affairs.

Is he flirtatious or lose in his speech or lose in his physical move with the opposite sex?

Does he unnecessary chat with the opposite sex?

ix. **Deacons must manage their children and their households well, v.12**

- A deacon must be a good spiritual leader at home.

He must train his children to behave appropriately, walking in obedience and submission.

This does not mean children should be certainly believers. **Benjamin Merkle** points out that this speaks about the behavior of the child (faithful), not the status of the child (believing).

Note: The qualifications of deacons are standards for normal Christian life.

1. CAN WOMEN BE DEACONS?

- ❖ “Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things” (1 Timothy 3:11, ESV).
- ❖ “Women *must* likewise *be* dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things” (1 Timothy 3:11, NASB).

FOR WOMEN DEACONS:

- Pronoun “Their” is not mentioned
- Wives of elders’ qualifications is not mentioned
- Church history testifies to women being deacons but not elders
Clement of Alexandria (AD 150–215), Origen of Alexandria (AD 184–253), John Chrysostom (AD 349–407), John Calvin (1509–1564), Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892)

AGAINST WOMEN DEACONS:

- Seven men in Acts 6 speaks about the choosing of men
- Diaconal work carries some authority. **Alexander Strauch**, “As church officeholders and assistants to the elders, deacons exercise authority and supervision within the congregation as delegated representatives of the elders.”

- 1 Timothy 3:11 speaks about deacon's wives, not about deaconess because vv. 8-10 speaks about deacon's qualifications and v. 12 speaks about deacon's qualifications. [STRONG ARGUMENT]

Why deacons' wives qualifications are mentioned? In his commentary on the pastoral epistles, George Knight contends that the women referred to in v. 11 are the deacons' wives who officially assist their deacon husbands with the care of the church's widows and other needy women. **Alexander Strauch**, "In the case of the elders' wives, assisting their husbands in their primary duties of teaching the Word would be prohibited (1 Tim. 2:12). Therefore, Paul did not list the qualifications for the deacons' wives."

MY VIEW:

The Scripture does not forbid women to be deacons, just as it forbids women from leadership and teaching to men in the church:

- ❖ **1 Timothy 2:11-12**, Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.
- ❖ **Romans 16:1-2**, I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant [deacon] of the church at Cenchreae, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.
 - **Note:** It is debatable whether Phoebe was officially a deacon or a helper in the church.

Conclusion: Considering that diaconal work carries some authority in the church, representing the elders' delegation, it is good that women can be deaconess for women's ministry rather than for the entire church.

6. APPOINTMENT OF DEACONS IN CHURCH

What is *Ekklesia*, the Greek word for *Church*?

Ekklesia is not just a gathered assembly for spiritual activities but also a governing body, making major decisions.

- ❖ **Matthew 18:17**, If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church (*ekklesia*), let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.
- ❖ **1 Corinthians 5:12**, For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church (*ekklesia*) whom you are to judge?
- ❖ **Acts 19:39**, [Town clerk] But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly (*ekklesia*).

J. C. Lambert, in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, “Throughout the Greek world and right down to NT times (cf. Acts 19:39), *ekklesia* was the designation of the regular assembly of the whole body of citizens in a free city-state, “called out” (Gr, ek, “out,” and kalein, “to call”) by the herald **for the discussion and decision of public business**” (Lambert 1929, 651).

- ❖ **Acts 6:1-6**, “Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve [deacon] tables. **Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men** of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” **And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose** Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.”

1. Deacons must be recognized based on their qualifications.
2. Deacons must be appointed by the church. [elders propose by asking recommendations by some mature members of the church]
3. Deacons must be formally appointed in church because there are certain qualifications for them, which speaks of deacon as an office.

IN CONCLUSION, CONVICTIONS OF EEF:

- i) In the biblical pattern of local churches, an assembly comprised of elders [plurality], deacons [plurality] and believers.
- ii) Deacons are distinct from the elders of church. They are assistants to the elders of the church and function under their leadership. They assist elders in effectively fulfilling their church responsibilities.
- iii) To become a deacon, one must be biblically qualified.
- iv) Women can become deaconesses for women's ministry.
- v) A deacon's primary responsibility is to take care of the administration of the church, relieving elders to focus more on the spiritual oversight of the church.
- vi) A deacon may not or may be permanent in his position. [To give opportunities to others to serve, deacons may pass on their responsibility to others after two years.]
- vii) If a deacon is not faithful and diligent in his responsibilities, after giving sufficient encouragement and admonishment, he may have to step down from his position.
- viii) A deacon may not or most probably become an elder.
- ix) It is a great privilege to become a deacon, serving God's people and growing strong in their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ with a great reward from Him in His Kingdom.
- x) God's church and kingdom is effectively built with teamwork—elders, deacons and believers laboring together for the fulfillment of His will.