

Gospel Truth

Biblical Instruction and Encouragement for the
Mission Field Worldwide.

CALLED TO SERVE

There is a great need today for individuals who will be faithful servants of the church. Many temporal and spiritual needs exist with which a congregation must deal. There are offerings to collect and distribute, cleaning and chapel maintenance projects, events to organize, the sick to visit, and the poor to help. It is a great blessing to the body of Christ for there to be faithful, consistent servants who quietly and yet diligently attend to these duties.

The well-being and longevity of a congregation are measured as much by the work of the faithful servants of the church as by the pastor and ministry. In many congregations, the burden of the temporal things as well as the spiritual rests on the shoulders of the ministry. When the ministry is too involved with the temporal affairs of the church, their minds and energy are not singularly focused on spiritual things. It is not only the responsibility but also the privilege of the congregants to offer themselves as servants. Christ left the ultimate example of servanthood. “For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

Just as a home needs continual care and maintenance, so does the physical property of the chapel. Often the work of the gospel is hindered because the temporal affairs of the congregation are not in order. How wonderful it is to behold people of all ages taking

responsibility in the body of Christ and serving to their personal capacity for the benefit of the church. A well-cared-for chapel and well-ordered temporal administration are a witness and testimony to the world.

1 Corinthians 4:2 states: “It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” God has entrusted His people not only with the spiritual gospel but also with serving and ministering to the needs of others. It is easy for people to occasionally volunteer, but something else for them to faithfully work and serve month after month with little to no acknowledgment. Saints are called to work for the Lord; that means satisfaction should come from pleasing God rather than from the recognition of man. The job of a servant is usually not glamorous, but it is to please the One whom he serves.

Whether it be as a deacon, trustee, Sunday school teacher, song leader, special singer, cook, janitor, or lay member in the congregation, there is a need for faithful servants upon whom the elders (ministry) can rely to accomplish the needful work of the church. Reliable service and availability to do what is needed for the smooth operation and work of the gospel are wonderful assets for the health of a congregation. God has



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WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT...

Word of God

2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; Matt. 24:35

Relationship of Love

Matt. 22:37-40; John 14:21-23; 1 John 4:7-11

Repentance

Acts 3:19; Acts 17:30; 2 Cor. 7:10

New Birth

John 3:3-7; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 6:1-4;
Eph. 2:1, 5-6

Freedom From Sin

1 John 5:18; Matt. 1:21; John 8:11

Infilling of the Holy Spirit

Acts 19:2; Acts 15:8-9; Acts 1:8

Holiness

Luke 1:73-75; Heb. 12:14; 1 Peter 1:15-16;
Titus 2:11-12; Rom. 6:22

Kingdom of God

Luke 17:20-21; Romans 14:17; John 18:36

The Church

Acts 2:47; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Col 1:18

Unity

John 17:20-23; Gal 3:28; Rev. 18:2-4

Ordinances

Matt. 28:19-20; Matt. 26:26-30;
1 Cor. 11:23-27; John 13:14-17

Divine Healing

Luke 4:18; Isaiah 53:4-5; James 5:13-16

Sanctity of Marriage

Matt. 19:5-6; Luke 16:18; Rom. 7:2-3;
1 Cor. 7:10-11

Outward Appearance

1 Tim. 2:9-10; 1 Cor. 11:14-15; Deut. 22:5

End of Time

2 Peter 3:7-12; John 5:28-29; 2 Cor. 5:10;
Matt 25:31-46

Pacifism

Luke 6:27-29; Luke 18:20

Worship

John 4:23-24; Eph. 5:19; 2 Cor. 3:17

Great Commission

Mark 16:15

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blessed His people with diverse skills and knowledge. Fewer needs would exist in the temporal and spiritual work of the church if people would more fully consecrate their time and talents to the cause of God. The joy and blessings of God often rest in the sacrifice of giving and serving.

Lift up your eyes and see the work around you and apply yourself as a faithful servant of the Lord. ■

Scriptural Qualifications of DEACONS

(1 Timothy 3:8-13 and Acts 6:3)

- Full of the Holy Ghost.
- Sober-minded.
- Not a drunkard.
- Truthful and honest. Not deceitful.
- Not greedy of money.
- Believing and living the true doctrine.
- Faithful.
- Proven. Not a novice but experienced.
- Full of wisdom.
- Of honest and good report.
- Blameless.
- The husband of one living wife (polygamy/adultery prohibited).
- Wife is to be sober, dignified, faithful, and not a gossip.
- Children are in subjection.
- Home is in proper care and order.

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Editorial



“Those who are deacons of the mysteries of Jesus Christ must please all men in all ways. For they are not deacons of meats and drinks [only] but servants of the church of God” (*Epistle of Ignatius to the Trallians*, 2nd century).

The topic this quarter is about the office of deacons. It is a very important subject, and I am convinced that if it were understood and taken more seriously, the gospel work would operate much more smoothly and congregations would be in better condition. It was not until I was in the middle of research and study that I concluded it is a difficult subject. Shortly thereafter, I was reading in *The Apostolic Church* and found where C. E. Brown came to the same conclusion: “The study of the office of the deacon is perhaps the most difficult of any phase of the constitution of the early church.”

The difficulty arises because there is very little said about the official office so we must couple our reading of the few scriptures with history to gain understanding of the issues. Deacons are vital to the well-rounded operation of the Church of God. While everyone is called to serve, it is evident that there are people serving as deacons in many congregations that may not have been ordained to the office. These are the individuals that have a special call of God to service and spiritual leadership that supersedes the limited term of a trustee or treasurer. These are those few faithful members who are steadfast and diligent, laboring in the temporal affairs of the congregation and also providing a spiritual, steadying hand to the work. A deacon by any other name is still a deacon, but there is value in recognizing the call of God to this divine office in the local church as exemplified in scripture. Let there be no confusion, God’s church does not have a titled ministry, nor does it have titled deacons. These offices are about service to God, not about status, recognition, or position. What is more important than the official office is the humble spirit of love and servitude.

While the subject has been polluted by the apostasy and organization of man by the Roman Catholic Church, the office of deacons has been part of God’s church since the apostles; and it is important that the teaching and practice continue. There are misconceptions when people think about deacons. Many think of a deacon as an old man who has been forever in the congregation, tenaciously holding on to authority; for it is usually true, when the pastor is gone, no longer serving in that capacity, the deacons remain. However, a deacon is a servant who faithfully assists the ministry for the temporal and spiritual edification of the congregation. Deacons are to be subject to the authority of the ministry and respectful of the people, serving the Lord in humility. A good deacon is steadfast and diligent, setting an example of service to all.

May God bless the Church of God with greater understanding of the practicalities of the office of the deacon.

Michael W. Smith

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Ministers & MONEY



The apostles had the congregation in Jerusalem choose seven men to handle the financial affairs of the church. This came about when the Grecians were complaining about unfair treatment in the charitable distributions. While not always possible, it is the better part of wisdom for a minister to step back from being a trustee or

from dealing with the financial affairs of his local congregation to avoid potential snares of the enemy. It frees the minister to be able to preach without regard to who is financially supporting him. After the pattern of the scripture, ministers should, as much as possible, allow men of good report among the congregation to oversee the financial affairs of their local congregations.

THE OFFICE OF A DEACON

While there are many spiritual gifts, the offices of the bishop and of the deacon are the two official offices that exist in the biblically defined New Testament church for leadership and operation under the authority of the Holy Spirit (1 Timothy 3:1, 8).



The office of the bishop is synonymous in scripture with that of the elder and is a term to denote the called and qualified preachers of the Word of God. There are many proofs that bishops and elders were the same, and it was not until the apostasy of the Roman Catholic Church that a distinction was created.

The second office is that of the deacon. Deacons are those that minister the temporal affairs of the church and assist the elders. The required qualifications of a deacon are similar to those of a bishop with the exception of “apt to teach.” It is a divinely appointed office and should only be filled by spiritually qualified people.

General References

The biblical study of the office of the diaconate can be difficult and somewhat elusive as the Bible clearly teaches the office and its qualifications but does not spell out in detail all the duties or administration of the office. God cares more about the character of the deacon than the job description. It is of utmost importance that the two offices be understood in balance without creating a hierarchy of administration beyond what was exemplified in the apostolic church. Hence, it is important to carefully study what is written in the Bible and analyze it in light of history and with consideration of the practical spiritual and temporal needs of a congregation.

Definition

Deacon is translated from the Greek word *diakonos* and means an attendant, a waiter of tables, a minister, a servant (*Strong's Dictionary*/

Thayer's Greek Definitions). The word *diakonos* is used at least 30 times throughout the New Testament and is translated differently depending on the context. Rarely is it used to denote the official office of the deacon. Consider a few scriptures for illustrative purposes. Matthew 20:26 reads, “Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister [*diakonos*/deacon].” Romans 13:4 refers to governmental rulers as ministers [*diakonos*/deacons]. Paul spoke as being “made a minister [*diakonos*/deacon], according to the gift of the grace of God” (Ephesians 3:7). *Diakonos* is translated “servant” in various passages. “He that is greatest among you shall be your servant [*diakonos*/deacon]” (Matthew 23:11). Literal servants of the king, waiters of tables, were referred to as *diakonos*/deacons in both Matthew 22:13 and John 2:9. Clearly, *diakonos* was used to denote different kinds of service and ministry; and saints are called to be ministers and servants in various capacities.

Office of a Deacon

Diakonos took on further technical significance when Paul addressed the church at Philippi around 62 AD. “To all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons [*diakonos*]” (Philippians 1:1). Paul addresses the saints and specifies the two distinct offices in the church, the bishops (elders) and deacons. This greeting is vital to understanding the organization and officers in the early Christian churches. Further credence and recognition are given to the office of deacons when Paul specifically gave the qualifications of these two distinct offices in 1 Timothy 3. “If a

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man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless.... Likewise must the deacons [*diakonos*] be...." By the time of Paul's writing, it is evident that there was a distinct and recognized office and position of a deacon that meant more than simple service in the body.

Necessity of the Office

With the foundation now laid that deacons existed in the operation of the apostolic church, the question remains, "What is the purpose of the deacon?" While the scripture does not specify all the particulars, information is gleaned from scriptural examples. The primary call of Christ was to preach the gospel, but He also taught His disciples to serve the poor and minister physically to the needy. Jesus and the disciples were financially supported at least in part by donations (Luke 8:3). There was a need for someone to manage the finances and giving. It appears that Judas carried the common purse that contained the money (John 12:4-6) and was responsible for buying supplies and giving to the poor (John 13:29). This simply reveals the practical need of someone to oversee the administration of general funds.

Chosen to Serve

After the day of Pentecost, the church grew very rapidly, and the apostles not only ministered the gospel but also handled the finances of the church. What is detailed in Acts 6:1-6 was most likely what led to the eventual development of the office of the deacon.

And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration [*diakonia*/deaconship]. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve [*diakoneo*/deacon] tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry [*diakonia*/deaconship] of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus,

and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.

These seven men were designated to wait tables, or rather, to be stewards of the financial and temporal needs of the burgeoning congregation at Jerusalem. While early writings referred to them as the first deacons (i.e. Irenaeus of the second century), Luke's writing in the book of Acts never specifically refers to the seven as deacons. Hence, there continues to be historical



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and theological controversy on this point. It is noteworthy that the church was in a state of growth. The situation in Acts 6 highlights at minimum the infancy of the office and need of the deacon, which would be further developed by the time Paul wrote 1 Timothy.

Duties and Responsibilities

Simply, deacons are spiritually called and qualified servants of the church. Historian and theologian Adam Clarke wrote concerning deacons: "The office of a deacon, in the primitive Church, was to serve in the *agapae*, or love feasts, to distribute the bread and wine to the communicants; to proclaim different parts and times of worship in the churches; and to take care of the widows, orphans, prisoners, and sick, who were provided for out of the revenues of the Church....They had the care of the poor, and preached occasionally" (*Adam Clarke Commentary*, Matthew 20:26).

Steward of Temporal Matters

That one of the primary duties of the deacon is to be a steward of church funds is without controversy. "In the ancient synagogues of

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the Jews there were three men to whom was entrusted the care of the poor....From these officers the apostles took the idea probably of appointing deacons in the Christian church, and doubtless intended that their duties should be the same” (*Albert Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*, Acts 6).

In the beginning, the seven men were given responsibility of overseeing food distribution to the poor and handling the money of the church. Other responsibilities grew with time as the office of the deacon evolved throughout history in both the Catholic and Protestant fellowship, often in sectarian and carnal ways. Bro. Ed Wilson, a Church of God elder, wrote: “It isn’t necessary to provide precise distinctions of duties and permitted activities; the functions of spiritual and temporal ministry overlap freely and without conflict because all the activities flow from pure hearts whose greatest aim is service—of any and every sort.” Great caution should be exercised in outlining other responsibilities, but there are intuitive and practical aspects of the office that, while not spelled out in the Bible, are in keeping with the tenor of the scripture.

The office of deacon is service-oriented, and there are many temporal duties on a weekly basis that need oversight in a congregation (i.e. care of chapel facilities, janitor work, sound system, etc.). These duties may be and often are taken care of by lay members, but they easily fall under the purview of a deacon. It is the function of the deacons to manage the finances and benevolent giving of the congregation. The deacons should communicate needs with the congregation and ensure that offerings are taken regularly for general expenses, charity, and the support of the ministry. All funds should be distributed fairly and honestly. Many a pastor and congregation have suffered because the deacons have not been faithful to their responsibilities.

Assistants of the Ministry

It is important to note that the seven men of Acts 6 were chosen by the congregation, confirmed by the apostles, and selected for

the purpose of assisting and relieving the apostles of some of their duties. With that as a model or precedent, it is clear why deacons’ responsibilities historically have gone beyond temporal duties. A true deacon not only serves in temporal matters but is the right hand of the ministry, assisting however necessary.

Faithful, Spiritual Leadership

Due to their high spiritual qualifications and confidence of the people, deacons provide not only temporal but also spiritual leadership in the church. In the pastor’s absence, a deacon is one upon whom he can rely. Deacons are spiritually qualified to lead services and help keep order in a congregation when necessary. They help organize and facilitate meetings and serve as a bridge between the elders and congregation. Adam Clarke made the interesting observation concerning deacons that they “occasionally preach.” Some deacons may also minister the Word as did Stephen and Philip in the book of Acts. Faithful deacons stand in the gap when a congregation is without a pastor and implicitly would be responsible for ensuring that truth and holiness are taught by the elders.

The office of deacon was secularized and politicized with the rise of the Catholic church. It is interesting to note that the early Catholic church forbade deacons from giving communion but allowed them to baptize in the absence of an elder or in “grave necessity.” It is the understanding and opinion of this writer that among the saints of God, deacons have and may assist with either baptism or the administration of the Lord’s supper when an elder requests the help. It is the primary responsibility of ministers to perform these functions, but they can be assisted by deacons (who are servants) when necessary.

All the saints are called to spend and be spent for the gospel in a life of service. However, a deacon has a special call and place to fill in the body of Christ. It is not about titles or prestige but about seeking to please God through sacrificial service to His people. A faithful, reliable deacon is invaluable as an assistant to the ministry and as a servant to the Church of God. ■



What is the difference between a trustee and a deacon?

While the office of trustee is not a biblically-mandated office prescribed in the Scripture, the role of trustee is scripturally appropriate as trustees are stewards. A board of trustees or board of directors is often a legal requirement for the registration and operation of a corporation in most countries. Often, a trustee is chosen or elected by the congregation for a period of years as set by the legal charter of the church. The trustee is the legal representative of the church and is legally responsible for church property, bills, etc. They often oversee the physical and financial aspects of the congregation. Trustees are authorized to buy and sell in the name of the incorporated church and to sign legal documents. Trustees or directors hold an important position of trust and should be of great integrity and honesty.

In many cases the trustee does the work of a deacon, and there is much overlap in job responsibility. The office of the deacon is a mandated, scriptural office, and there is greater spiritual significance to this position in the operation of the church. Deacons are required to meet the prescribed qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 as a spiritual officer, while trustees are required to meet the qualifications as outlined by the legal organization. Bro. Ed Wilson stated, "The Bible gives the qualifications of deacons, the by-laws give the qualifications for trustees." Some congregational by-laws require that a trustee must meet the qualifications of a deacon, but not always. Some governments require churches to have trustees from the community such as a lawyer, teacher, etc. In these cases, there needs to be a clear distinction between the legal requirements vs. the spiritual government of the church. As one author penned, "A deacon meets the needs of the people, a trustee meets the needs of the property."

Should deacons be ordained?

Ordination of elders is a clear practice and teaching in the New Testament church (see *Gospel Truth*, Issue 33). While there is no scriptural rule, there is foundation for the practice of ordaining elders. In Acts 6, after the seven men were chosen, the apostles prayed and laid hands on them. There are various thoughts from theologians as to whether this was a formal ordination or a mere confirmation of the work they were to do.

Bro. Ostis Wilson wrote concerning this: "These seven Spirit-filled men who were chosen by the Church and ordained for this service (deacons) by the apostles, took charge of this situation and were enabled by the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit to steer things in the right course."



The fact that the deacon is one of two distinct offices in the church, coupled with the fact that there is an historically long pattern of ordination to that office, indicate that ordination of deacons was also the acceptable practice. Ordination confirms and establishes to the church the call of God on those individuals to serve in temporal matters as recognized, official servants to the church. It's not the title but "what mattered was that the saints understood they were people to whom they could go with problems" (Ed Wilson, 2020).

H. M. Riggle (a pioneer minister of the Church of God) wrote: "In every congregation . . . the Lord calls certain ones and by His Spirit qualifies them to be elders or overseers. Others He calls to the work of deacons. 'He sets the members every one in the body as it pleaseth him.' The ministry recognizes these calls and by the laying on of hands, just like the apostles and ministers of old, dedicate to the various kinds of work those whom the Lord has chosen and qualified. This is called ordination. Deacons are chosen and ordained to look after the temporal affairs of the church" (*The Christian Church*, 1912).



DID YOU KNOW?

The Shepherd of Hermas (c. 150 A.D.) wrote concerning corrupt deacons:

“They that have spots are the deacons that exercised their office ill and plundered the livelihood of widows and orphans and made gains for themselves from the ministrations they had received to perform” (Sim., IX, 26).



A Word
in Season

A POOR WISE MAN

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Jesus has called His followers to a simple life of humble servitude. In a religious world where people too often strive for position, recognition, and power, consider the story told by a king of ancient Jerusalem about a poor wise man:

“There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it: Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man. Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard. The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools” Ecclesiastes 9:14-17.

Oh, that there were more “poor wise men” among us.

The victories to our battles and the solutions to our problems come not by the loudest voice nor by the man with the most name recognition. Wisdom is often found in the quiet quarters of the faithful. While often neglected and despised, the poor wise man’s words brought deliverance to the city. He was not heralded as a hero, no accolades were bestowed, no parties or celebrations were given in his honor, no plaques were posted nor statues erected to remember the one who saved the city. The people in the city, so close to having been destroyed, went on with life; and the poor wise man was forgotten.

Very often, the work of God in congregations moves forward in victory on the backs of a poor wise man or woman. Their work is not glamorous and there is no fanfare. They are hardly acknowledged or recognized for their service, wisdom, and faithfulness; but without them, the city would be lost. The poor wise man was not in the limelight, and yet in his poverty he willingly offered his wisdom when the time was right. May every child of God be challenged to seek not for fame or power but to seek in his poverty to please the Master, with quiet wisdom and strength serving the people.

To the poor wise men and women among us, thank you for your love, grace, wisdom, and service. We love and appreciate you. God bless! ■



HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD