

## Sermon Outline

### **“The Deacons” How Church Works, part 6 – Philippians 1:1-2; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Acts 6:1-7 – Mark Mitchell – March 18, 2012**

#### **What Is a Deacon?**

1. The word “deacon” comes from the Greek word, *diakonos*. It means “one who serves” or “servant.” It is used 29 times in the New Testament. In almost all of these occurrences, it is translated “servant” because the meaning of the word, in its context, is non-technical. (For examples, see John 2:5; Mark 10:43; Romans 13:4, 15:8; 1 Corinthians 3:5 and 2 Corinthians 11:15).
2. In two passages, Philippians 1:1-2 and 1 Timothy 3:8, the word *diakonos* is translated as “deacon” and carries a more technical meaning.
  - a. In Philippians 1:1-2, most scholars agree that *diakonos* should be translated “deacons” because it refers to a specific role in the church, especially because it occurs in conjunction with the word “overseers” which refers to the office of elder.
  - b. In 1 Timothy 3:1-13, three general observations can be made:
    - i. Elders/overseers are mentioned first and the deacons are mentioned in relationship to them. This implies that the primary office in the local church is the office of the elder and that the role of deacons is subject to and in support of the elders.
    - ii. The word “likewise” in verses 8 & 10 refer back to verses 1-2. In each case, Paul is introducing a new category of those who are to be qualified to serve in a more official way in the church.
    - iii. With both elders and deacons, Paul’s predominant concern is for the person’s character. One key distinction, however, is that to qualify to be an elder, one must be able to teach.
3. What is a deacon? From these verses we learn: Deacons are qualified, have a non-governing role in the church, and serve under the direction and oversight of the elders.

#### **What are the Qualifications of Deacons?**

1. Before considering the qualifications of deacons, we must try to understand the meaning of verse 11. Are the women mentioned in verse 11 the (1) wives of deacons, (2) women deacons, or (3) women who assist the deacons? One of the reasons this is so challenging is that the Greek word translated “wives” is a generic word that also means an adult

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“woman” or “wife.” One must examine the context to determine whether it should be translated as “wife” or “woman.”

- a. In the context of 1 Timothy 3, there is broad agreement among Bible scholars that verses 8-10 and verse 12 refers to men. Tucked between these qualifications for male deacons, Paul introduces a new category for women with the word, “likewise.” On one hand, the flow of thought suggests to many that Paul is referring here to the wives of the deacons. On the other hand, the absence of a definite article (“their” is not in the original Greek manuscript) suggests Paul is referring to women who are deacons instead of wives.
  - b. So what can we conclude? Though it is unclear whether these were female deacons, the wives of deacons, or diaconal assistants, what the Scripture does make clear is that women *were* involved in diaconal work and needed to be qualified to do so. The pastoral team is considering what title we will use. But in keeping with this passage, they want women to be serving in diaconal work.
2. Qualifications for the men (1 Timothy 3:8-10, 12):
- a. “Dignified” – He must be honorable and worthy of respect.
  - b. “Not double-tongued” – He must be sincere in his speech, not saying one thing and doing something else.
  - c. “Not addicted to much wine” – He can’t be someone who abuses alcohol.
  - d. “Not greedy for dishonest gain” – He must demonstrate contentment and integrity in financial dealings.
  - e. “Hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” – He must have a firm grip on the gospel and its implications for life. His doctrinal beliefs must be sound and his day-to-day life must line up with his doctrine.
  - f. “Husband of one wife” – If married, he must be faithful to his wife.
  - g. “Managing their children and their own households well” – He must supervise his family well, demonstrating faithful leadership at home.
  - h. “Tested” and proven “blameless” – Candidates for diaconate ministry must be thoroughly examined and demonstrate proven character consistent with Scripture’s requirements.

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3. Qualifications for the women (1 Timothy 3:11):
  - a. "Dignified" – She is to live a respectable and honorable life.
  - b. "Not slanderers" – She must not be given to malicious speech or destructive gossip.
  - c. "Sober-minded" – She must temperate, exercising self-control and good judgment in her behavior.
  - d. "Faithful in all things" – She is trustworthy, reliable and dependable.
4. Both men and women serving in diaconate ministry are to be mature Christians who, though not perfect, are nonetheless upright in character.

## What Does a Deacon Do?

1. When it comes to the responsibilities of deacons, the Scriptures do not tell us exactly what deacons are to do. However, clues are given in three places:
  - a. First, from how the word group for *diakonos* used in Scripture. The word is used for all different kinds of service. However, the word can specifically mean, "to wait at table" and it is often used in cases of practical service and the kinds of works associated with mercy ministry.
  - b. Second, from the qualifications for deacons. Some see financial responsibilities implied in that they weren't to be greedy for dishonest gain. Others see administrative responsibilities implied in that deacons were to manage their home life well. Still others see significant involvement with people because of the requirement for sincere speech and a blameless life. But none of this is clear or conclusive.
  - c. Thirds, from Acts 6:1-7. Although the noun form of "deacon" is not used in this passage, the verb form appears twice: verse 2 – "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to *deacon* tables"; verse 4 – "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the *deaconing* of the word."
    - i. These verses, along with the clear distinction between those given to the ministry of the Word and those given to practical service has led a number of commentators, scholars, and pastors to conclude that this passage gives a prototype of diaconate ministry.

*"Acts 6:1-4 shows an apostolically authorized division of labor in the church that lays the groundwork for the offices of elder and deacon."* – Robert H. Thune, *Deacons: A Theological Study*, page 5

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*"The seven men chosen in Acts 6, while not specifically called deacons, provide the closest parallel to the Christian office. Just as the Seven were needed to attend to the physical needs of the Greek-speaking Jewish widows, so deacons are needed to look after the physical needs of the church." – Benjamin L. Merkle, 40 Questions about Elders and Deacons, page 232.*

- i. If, from Act 6, we believe this division of labor in the church is indicative of the diaconate role, then what it suggests is that deacons are called to do the work of practical service in the church thereby freeing the elders to focus on the ministry of the Word and prayer.
5. What does a deacon do? From these verses we learn: deacons serve under the direction and oversight of the elders in areas of practical or mercy-related ministry.

### Why Do We Need Deacons?

1. We need deacons because the Chief Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, has prescribed in Scripture that both elders and deacons are important for the local church. If we would be a healthy, strong, and effective local church, we need diaconal ministry.
2. We need deacons because the elders need the help. God has given elders the privilege and sober responsibility to govern, lead, teach, shepherd and equip the church. They need diaconate ministry so that the elders can remain focused on their primary calling.
3. We need deacons because there are areas of need (e.g., medical, financial, job-related, home maintenance, etc.) here at Covenant Life that require the maturity, grace, wisdom and practical service that deacons are intended to bring.
4. We need deacons because as Paul says in 1 Tim 3:13, "those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus."

*"This final passage should be a source of enormous encouragement to deacons. Here Paul declares that faithful deacons gain significant influence and honor in the church, and that they can become spiritual powerhouses for God who exercise bold faith in Christ in all their labors. Let no one demean the church diaconate." – Alexander Strauch, The New Testament Deacon, page 147.*

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### **Fellowship Starters**

1. Take time as a Care Group to read Acts 6:1-7, Philippians 1:1-2 and 1 Timothy 3:1-13.
2. From participation in other churches, what has been your experience with the ministry of deacons?
3. Based on what Mark shared, how would you describe the role and function of deacons?
4. Why is character so important in considering the men and women who serve in diaconal ministry?
5. What do you believe 1 Timothy 3:11 refers to: wives of deacons, women deacons or women who assist deacons? Why is it not critical to definitely know what this verse means?
6. What kind of practical mercy-ministries do you think would serve the body of Covenant Life?
7. Would you ever consider serving as a deacon?