

Deacons

The deacons were the first church office to be created out of necessity. Notice how women were not chosen to serve in this ministry. It was the men who were chosen to be the servants in this public ministry. Their main qualifications are listed: “known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.”

The Seven – The First Deacons

Acts 6:1-4 (NIV) In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.² So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait (*diakoneo*) on tables.³ Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them⁴ and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

- There was a problem: widows were overlooked in the daily distribution of food.
- They gathered all the disciples together: all were to agree in the choosing
- The chosen were to be given a responsibility – to wait on tables
- A priority had to be maintained by the apostles: that of prayer and the ministry of the word.

This was the first time a margin was created for the sake of the apostle’s devotion to prayer and the ministry of the word. The apostles were not meant to do everything, their calling was specific, so delegation was needed in order to accomplish day-to-day service. They chose Stephen and the other deacons to perform day-to-day service, so they could create the “margin” needed in their lives to devote “to prayer and to the ministry of the word”.

Exegesis

Of Acts 6:3-4

This passage teaches us a few things:

- 1- Men were chosen
- 2- Qualifications given to fulfill the responsibility

- 3- Because there was a priority that couldn't be overlooked: prayer and the ministry (*diakonia*) of God's Word (logos) – the preaching and teaching of it by the apostles.

Men were chosen

Men = *aner*, differentiated from *anthropos* = which is a generic reference to all human individuals, male or female.

Thayer Definition:

1) with reference to sex

1a) of a male

1b) of a husband

1c) of a betrothed or future husband

2) with reference to age, and to distinguish an adult man from a boy

When Paul encourages Timothy to not “*let anyone look down on you because you are young*” (1 Timothy 4:12), it was not because he was not a man, but because he was a young man (young - *neotes* = newness), perhaps regarded as inexperienced (immature) in certain aspects of life, not because he was a teenager.

Historically, we know Timothy to have been 30 – 35 years of age in this writing, so he was comparatively young when contrasted with the elders at Ephesus.

In the Jewish faith, if anyone was in their 30's or 40's they were still considered young. They really didn't validate what you said nor considered you worthwhile to listen. They figured you didn't really have much experience living so your words would be empty and full of yourself.

This is illustrated in the remarks made to Jesus, “you are not yet 50 years old and you have seen Abraham?!” (John 8:57)

In Christ we need to set an example no matter what age we are. We need to show ourselves faultless and blameless, especially to those who are older than us. This is done above all by being humble and open to correction.

Timothy's encouragement was to call himself to a higher standard than those around him, since people will try to look for mistakes in your life to discredit what you are teaching.

Let me just add that if someone is open to the Gospel, they will be open to receive the word from anyone, including those younger than themselves.

Lower Age Limit?

Is there a lower limit of age that should be considered? There are no instructions given in the New Testament as to setting an arbitrary age for this calling but built into the *language* of the passage we are given some guidelines. The Greek word translated as *men*, implies a male old enough to be considered for betrothal, distinguishing an adult male from a boy. **The idea here is that these men were called to give an account.** There was a responsibility that was going to be given to them and they had to be able to respond on their own recognizance. They could not be dependent on another adult to do this for them. “Dad won’t let me”, or “I need Mom’s permission”, could not be excuses given from these men. As long as an individual is under the subjection of their parents (Luke 2:51; Eph 6:1), they are not responsible for themselves and unable to give an account on their own recognizance.

- The Old Testament does give age limits for responsibility
- It was a standard for men of the age of 20 to be considered fit for service in the army of Israel (Numbers 1:1-3, 21-22). God had made this distinction in Israel solely by age alone in order to fulfill this responsibility.
- When the Lord pronounces a curse to all Israel because of their lack of faith in Numbers 14:22-33, the Lord held accountable all those who were 20 and up, allowing those 19 and under to inherit the land after the 40 years in the wilderness was over. Only Caleb and Joshua were excluded from the punishment.
- Even Jesus did not start his ministry until he was 30, which adds weight to this topic as well.

These are passages to consider when determining who was considered a boy and who was considered a man in the Jewish mind – who is ready to accept the responsibility of offices in the church.

They Must Be Tested

Furthermore, in the qualifications for deacons given to Timothy we are told *they first must be tested, and if there's nothing against them, let them serve as deacons* (1 Tim 3:10). This is the reason for the MOS, to test these men and prep them for future deaconship.

How are the deacons to be tested? We need to see the fruit of all these qualities mentioned in these passages blooming. The fruit need to be evident even before they are asked to serve in this way. The test is to be proven blameless when asked to serve in any capacity. If someone wants to serve as a deacon, they must be tested or given a trial run. If the person already has a track record of good service and is above reproach (blameless) then the person is a blooming deacon. They have the possibility of being installed as a deacon if the need arises.

The idea is to provide a venue for testing these young men to prepare them for the works of service. Not only for serving in the assembly, but for works of service all around. When the first deacons were called it was not for the purpose of serving in the assembly, but for the distribution of food and benevolence for some widows that were being overlooked. It was for service in the community at large. All church offices are for this kind of service; service that mostly happens outside of our general assemblies.

Also, there is a potential enablement of ego (pride) when appointing someone to church offices. Timothy is told *a man must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil* (1 Tim 3:6).

If this is true of a man, it can be an even more sensitive consideration for a boy. A baptized boy who is still under subjection to his parents is not only a recent convert, but still inexperienced and immature, unable to be accountable for his own actions and very susceptible to becoming conceited lacking the spiritual and emotional experience to know humility and meekness.

Qualifications Given

1. Of good reputation – (KJV, NASB, ESV) - *martyreō* – who have a good report; who is a witness, having experienced something by perception; able to give testimony.
2. Full of the Spirit – (*pneuma*) In the book of Acts – this phrase is used of those who have obeyed the Gospel and have the indwelling of the Spirit. It

is also used when the disciples showed courage and wisdom and a burning desire to spread the Gospel and testify to Jesus' resurrection. It doesn't necessarily refer to the ability to work miracles.

3. Full of Wisdom – (*sophia*) Spirit and wisdom show temperance. Deacons are not just to be zealous brethren or just wise brethren, but those who by the Spirit showed temperance and discernment. In order to have responsibility over a ministry you need these qualifications. Wisdom is the mature and intelligent display of knowledge.

Responsibility

The responsibility given was to distribute food evenly among the Hellenistic and Hebraic Jews who were disciples. They were to be waiters (*diakonos*), waiting on the need of those who were consumers.

Acts 6:2 (NIV) It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.

Deacons are those who provide a service where there is a need. They provide a service and/or materials needed for a service.

Priority to Preserve

They were appointed to serve in this capacity to preserve the priority the apostles had of the ministry of the word of God and prayer.

It is important to note that these Seven (Acts 21:8) were to be assistants to the apostles, and so their qualifications are not similar to the deacons Paul calls for to assist elders and evangelists in their congregations. We will study these in the following passages:

Of 1 Tim 3:8-13

1 Timothy 3:8-13 (NIV) In the same way, **deacons** (*diakonos*) are to be worthy of respect (*semnos*), sincere (*me dilogos*), not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain (*aischrokerdes*).⁹ They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.¹⁰ They must first be tested (*dokimazo*); and then if there is nothing against them (*anegkletos*), let them serve as deacons (*diakoneo*).

¹¹ In the same way (*hosautos*), the women (*gune*) are to be worthy of respect

(*semnos*), not malicious talkers (*diabolos*) but temperate (*nephalios*) and trustworthy (*pistos*) in everything.

¹² A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well. ¹³ Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

Definition

Qualifications for the **deacons** (*diakonos*: to run on errands; an attendant, that is, (generally) a waiter (at table or in other menial duties): - deacon, minister, servant) are to be as the elders. These men freely and willingly serve as deacons. These men have these gifts of serving (ministry). Before they are appointed as deacons they are already serving in the body of Christ.

Deacons are appointed when a need arises for that particular service so that those whose ministry is prayer and the Word of God is not neglected.

Qualifications

1. In the same way...

- a. The Spirit repeats these qualifications in a summarized way, as to indicate that the deacons and the elders are to be held to the same standards

2. Qualification

- a. **Worthy of Respect** – *Dignified (semnos)* – honorable, grave, honest. This word was used in verse 4, describing how the children out to submit to the elders - with all dignity. In other words, the submission doesn't occur because of fear or terror or bribe, but because they revere him in all honesty. Their life causes people to respect them and to love them.
- b. **Sincere** – *Not Double-Tongued (dilogos)* – equivocal, that is, telling a different story: double-tongued, double in speech, saying one thing with one person another with another (with the intent to deceive); two-faced. We can also equal this to being double-minded or a hypocrite. Talking without action. The deacon's speech must have integrity. They need to be men of their word.
- c. **Not indulging in much wine** – *not addicted (given) to much wine* – A deacon's mind should not turn to drinking or any other vice. They

must be sober as 1Thes 5:6-8 says. Not act or do things like the world does. We need to be awake and pursue the things that belong to the day.

- d. **Not pursuing dishonest gain** – *not greedy for dishonest gain* – *aischrokerdes* – NOT eager for base gain, greedy for money; sordid: - given to (greedy of) filthy lucre. Same as 1 Tim 3:3. He cannot be into being a deacon for the money. He should not be money-minded but people-minded.
- e. **Keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience**
 - i. The deacon must have deep convictions about his faith without doubt or wavering between opinions. He must be able to give clear explanations of what he believes in and back it up with his life.
 - ii. What are the deep truths of the faith?
 1. Paul refers to the mystery of the faith which he talks extensively about in Eph 1:9-10 and Eph 3:2-6, among other passages.
 2. Ephesians 1:9-10 (NIV) he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment —to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.
 3. Ephesians 3:2-6 (NIV) Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you,³ that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly.⁴ In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,⁵ which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.⁶ This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.
 4. The mystery has to do with how God is to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

5. This mystery also deals with how people, whether Jewish or gentile, are made heirs and members of the one body, sharers in the promise of the Gospel in Jesus Christ.
 6. It is the Gospel mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory! (Col 1:27)
 7. [Colossians 1:27 \(NIV\)](#) To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.
 8. The deep truths of the faith deal with how to become a Christian through the gospel, receiving Jesus in you by the Holy Spirit, by being immersed in Christ for the forgiveness of sins. ([Acts 2:38](#); [Rom 6:3-4](#); [Mat 28:19-20](#))
 9. To us it is no mystery any more, but it still remains at large among most people in the world who refuse God's foolishness thinking their wisdom can save them.
- iii. The deacons must hold to this mystery with a clear conscience, truly believing with the deepest of convictions which is proved by how they are not swayed by human philosophies or false doctrine.
 - iv. The deacons will show this by being doers of the Word of God. Their faith shows by actions. They will show concern for the lost and be focused on serving their brothers and sisters and serving the lost with the Gospel.
- f. **Must first be tested** – *proven blameless* – *dokimazo* – scrutinized to see whether they are genuine or not, as with jewels or metals.
- i. How are the deacons to be tested? We need to see the fruit of all these qualities mentioned in these passages blooming. The fruit need to be evident even before they are asked to serve in this way. The test is to be proven blameless when asked to serve in any capacity. If someone wants to serve as a deacon, they must be tested or given a trial run. If the person already has a track record of good service and is above reproach (blameless) then the person is a blooming deacon. They have the possibility of being installed as a deacon if the need arises.

- ii. The idea is to provide a **venue** for testing these young men to prepare them for the works of service. Not only for serving in the assembly, but for works of service all around. When the first deacons were called it was not for the purpose of serving in the assembly, but for the distribution of food and benevolence for some widows that were being overlooked. It was for service in the community at large. All church offices are for this kind of service; service that mostly happens outside of our general assemblies.
- iii. This is the reason for our Men's Order of Services (MOS), to test these men and prep them for future deaconship.
- g. **If there is nothing against them** – *beyond reproach* – *anegkletos* – blameless.
- h. **Let them serve as deacons** – *diakoneo* – wait upon, minister, serve.
- i. **The women are to be worthy of respect** – *their wives are to be worthy of respect*
 - i. This is an interesting qualification. It assumes the women we are speaking of are the wives of the deacon. KJV assumes that and so does God's Word. Other versions don't, in keeping with the original texts.
 1. *Gune* – can be translated as *women* or *wives*
 2. This could be referring to women who serve in the church in any capacity and to the wives of the deacon.
 3. The **preferred view** is that it is speaking particularly about the deacon's wives, since it is sandwiched between the qualifications of the deacon, and the adverb likewise (*hosautos*) is used, meaning, just as these qualifications must be true for deacons, their women must, in the same way, be these things.
 4. However, any woman who is serving in any way in the church should meet these qualifications.
 - ii. **Worthy of respect** – *dignified* – *semnos* – august, venerable, reverend; honorable, grave, honest. This word was used in verse 4, describing how the children out to submit to the elders – with all dignity. In other words, the submission doesn't

occur because of fear or terror or bribe, but because they **revere her in all honesty; respecting and obeying her**. She doesn't have to yell or cry to communicate. She simply speaks quietly and serves her husband in quietness and all dignity (1Pe 3:1-2).

- iii. **Not malicious talkers** – *not slanderers – diabolos* – false accuser, devil, slanderer. Women are often portrayed with a tendency to gossip but a godly woman is not a part of Satan's schemes. **To gossip, which often includes slander, is to side with the devil.**
- iv. **Temperate** – *sober-minded – nephaleos* – abstaining from wine, either entirely or at least from its immoderate use; sober, vigilant. A sober person, like an elder, must keep his mind clear of confusion and doesn't seek to alter his mind by the use of any mind-altering drug or pharmaceutical product, whether illegal or legal. She is a person who abstains from daydreaming or wishful thinking. She is firmly grounded in concreteness and practicality. She is not the overly sensitive type, reacting to things as opposed to being proactive. She cannot have a cow. Needs to be calm and collected. If you are in the presence of such a person, she should have a calming effect on you.
- v. **Trustworthy in everything** – *faithful – pistos* – objectively trustworthy; subjectively trustful: - believing, confiding, trusting. She should be faithful in all things, that is, her quality of faithfulness transcends her person and permeates all she does and whomever she serves.
- j. **Manage household well** – *presides honestly in his home*
 - i. **Faithful to his wife** – *the husband of one wife* – Not being remarried or of multiple marriages – **free from adultery**. This attests that deacons are male. A deacon must be married, never having had a divorce. This indicates a stable marriage led by a good strong and faithful head. There is an exception: Rom 7:2-3 talks about the exception of death. If a man had a wife and then she dies and he marries again it is acceptable.

- ii. **Manage children well** – The deacon as a father must be a pace-setter at the home; equitable, trustworthy, peaceable and authoritative. His wife and children love him because he is fair and spiritual. His word is gold and he keeps promises. He is truly an example worthy of imitation as he walks in the steps of his God. He leads by serving and caring as a good servant does. Does the wife and children lead him? No! His wife trusts him and eagerly submits to him as his children do.
- iii. **Manage household well** – The deacon must be a true head of his house. His wife and children should confirm that by the way they respectfully obey him and submit themselves to his authority.

3. Promise

a. **Gain an excellent standing and great assurance in the faith**

- i. *If they serve well...*
 - ii. Serving as a deacon will gain them a worthy standing within the church, the people of God and God Himself.
 - iii. They will also gain great confidence (assurance) in the faith.
- b. The results of serving as a deacon are eternal and so their goal in serving must be motivated by these eternal results in Jesus Christ our Lord.

SUMMARY

Qualifications

1. Men – Acts 6:3; 1 Tim 3:12
2. Full of the spirit – Acts 6:3
3. Full of wisdom – Acts 6:3
4. Worthy of respect – 1 Tim 3:8
5. Sincere – 1 Tim 3:8
6. Not indulging in much wine – 1 Tim 3:8
7. Not pursuing dishonest gain – 1 Tim 3:8
8. Keeping hold of the deep truths of the faith – 1 Tim 3:9
9. Must first be tested – 1 Tim 3:10
10. Must be beyond reproach – 1 Tim 3:10
11. Must have respectful wives – 1 Tim 3:11

12. Must be faithful to his wife – 1 Tim 3:12

13. Must manage his household well – 1 Tim 3:12

Duties

1. Wait on tables – Acts 6:2-3

2. Provide a service and/or materials to fulfill a need.