

DOCTRINE OF DEACONS

I. Preliminary considerations.

- A. The office of deacon is one of the two offices authorized for the local church for the Church age; the only other authorized office is that of pastor-teacher. 1Tim. 3:1,8
- B. Unlike the pastor-teacher, who is selected by God and bestowed upon the church, the deacon is a volunteer whose office is administered by men. Eph. 4:11; Acts 6:3
- C. Neither office is to be confused with the spiritual gift that each believer receives at the point of salvation.
- D. In the royal chain of command, the deacon is ranked below the pastor-teacher and above the general congregation. Acts 6:3

II. Vocabulary.

- A. There is no Old Testament vocabulary for this office since it did not come into existence until the Church age.
- B. Greek vocabulary.
 - 1. διάκονος (diakonos), 30X, one who executes the commands of another, one who runs errands, a servant, minister or deacon.
 - 2. διακονέω (diakoneo), 37X, to render service or ministry, to wait on tables, to administer the physical aspects of life to those in need, to function as a deacon.

III. The origin of the office of deacon.

- A. In the early church at Jerusalem, the twelve apostles were in charge of every aspect of the ministry of that congregation.
- B. The church had a regular and on-going ministry of providing for the poor among them, which the apostles administered.
- C. While this was, and is, a legitimate ministry for a congregation, it was causing them to take time away from what they viewed as their primary responsibilities: studying, teaching and praying.
- D. A complaint arose among those who were the recipients of this ministry that caused the apostles to take immediate and decisive action.
- E. They consulted among themselves, determined their course of action, and brought the need before the congregation.
 - 1. They informed the group that an undesirable situation had arisen.
 - 2. They gave them orders to seek out and select seven men who would be willing to be placed in charge of this ministry.
 - 3. The purpose of delegating this authority to these men was to free the apostles of this responsibility so they could devote themselves to their primary functions as the spiritual leaders of that church.
- F. They outlined the qualifications that these seven men needed to possess.
 - 1. They must have a good reputation, indicating that it is a necessity for deacons to be trusted by those whom they serve.
 - 2. They were to be men who were full of the Spirit, pointing out that these had to be men who were consistent in isolating their sin natures, maintaining spiritual momentum, and applying at an obviously high level.
 - 3. They were to be full of wisdom, indicating that they must be men who knew the will of God and had the discernment, faith, and objectivity necessary to apply appropriately in any given situation.

- G. The congregation responded to the apostles' leadership and selected the seven men who were willing to take the responsibility for this ministry.
- H. They appear to have selected seven men who were from the Hellenists (although that cannot be proven completely) in order to defuse the complaint of the Hellenistic Hebrews against the native Hebrews.
- I. These seven men were brought to the apostles for final approval and were formally installed into the new office.
- J. Observations based on this event and the origin of the office of deacon.
 - 1. Some problems and needs in the local church need to be addressed by the leadership.
 - 2. Do not be afraid to bring what you perceive as a problem to the board.
 - 3. The leadership determines the need and timing for a deacon to be placed into the office
 - 4. While the leadership initiates the process, the congregation has to make the determination as to who they trust and deem worthy to be placed in this position of authority and responsibility.
 - 5. The primary function of the apostles sets the tone for the function of the pastor-teacher: the study/teach/pray routine.
 - 6. This office came into existence in order to relieve the leadership of the necessary aspects of the ministry that could be handled by any competent advancing male believer.
 - 7. There were, and are, no female deacons. 1Tim. 3:12
 - 8. A deacon must possess and reflect solid spiritual traits in his personal life since this is necessary to commend him to others.
 - 9. Obviously, if a deacon does not fulfill his responsibility and is not diligent to make certain that his area(s) are properly administered, he is quite limited in terms of his value to the ministry.
 - 10. If one is not motivated and does not have the desire to serve in this capacity, he will not make a good deacon, spiritual growth and maturity notwithstanding.

IV. The deacon godliness code--qualifications for those seeking or in the office. Acts 6:3; 1Tim. 3:8-12

- A. Must be a male. Acts 6:3; 1Tim. 3:8; cp. 2:12
- B. Must have a good reputation among those in the local church. Acts 6:3
- C. Must be Spirit-filled. Acts 6:3
- D. Must aspire to the office. 1Tim. 3:8 cp. 3:1
- E. Must be dignified/respectable. 1Tim. 3:8
 - 1. To be respectable does not mean that the deacon is to be a humorless man; nor should he put people off by seeming to be unapproachable.
 - 2. His office is to reflect a seriousness of purpose, having an overt demeanor that is unflappable and levelheaded in the face of crisis or difficulties; he should carry out his duties in a decorous fashion.
 - 3. He should manifest a gracious manner that enables believers to approach him with their problems, concerns, etc.
- F. He is not to be double-tongued. 1Tim. 3:8
 - 1. Two-faced or hypocritical, failing to practice what he enforces, or pretending to feel or be something that he is not.
 - 2. Untrustworthy or false, one who is not reliable by virtue of being evasive or circumventing.
 - 3. This denotes a man who says one thing to one person and a conflicting thing to another so that on comparing notes, the discrepancy becomes apparent.
 - 4. One who supports a doctrine or issue verbally, but in the presence of others contradicts it is unfit to serve.
 - 5. While this trait would be bad enough in any person, it is especially dangerous for an officer of the local church, who deals with people and is to represent the truth as it is taught.

- G. He must be one who is not a drunkard, applying sufficient moderation in drinking so as not to distract from his witness and function. ITim. 3:8
 - H. He is not to be fond of sordid gain; this denotes someone that engages in dishonest business practices. ITim. 3:8
 - I. He must consistently possess/hold to the workings of the plan of God via Bible doctrine and must do so with a clear conscience. ITim. 3:9
 - 1. He must possess a background of the Word of God based on sufficient time under face-to-face teaching. Cp. Act.6:3
 - 2. In order to have a clear conscience he must:
 - a. Model the doctrine he knows as he leads others.
 - b. Be faithful to maintain regular attendance in Bible class.
 - c. He must show diligence with respect to the duties of his office.
 - J. The godliness code also applies to the deacon's wife. ITim. 3:11
 - 1. She must maintain an overt decorum that is respectable.
 - 2. She must have self-control, especially in the area of verbal sinning, since she will likely be privy to sensitive information from time to time.
 - 3. She must be temperate, exercising moderation and not given to excess.
 - K. A deacon is to practice monogamy and maintain faithfulness to the principle of right man/right woman.
 - L. He must maintain his children (those still at home) under subjection to his authority, which will be manifested by his control over them. ITim. 3:12
 - M. In general, he must manage his household and family in a sound, biblical fashion.
 - 1. When dealing with disobedient children, he is to do so in a respectable manner, not by yelling, screaming, etc.
 - 2. He must not disregard his responsibilities toward the management of the home by neglecting proper financial management or abusing his authority over his wife or children.
 - N. Apart from the requirement of being able to teach (ITim. 3:2), the qualifications for deacons are much the same as they are for pastor-teachers.
- V. Before one is placed in the office, he must undergo a period of observation and testing to determine his fitness for the office. ITim. 3:10
- A. This qualification was not required in Acts for the very obvious reason that this was the first experience in this area.
 - B. It seems logical to conclude that any man that aspires to the office should provide overt proof of his desire to serve the local church in this capacity. ITim. 3:10
 - 1. The first thing anyone must do is to make the leadership aware of his desire to serve in the office of deacon.
 - 2. Upon confirmation of his desire to serve, the pastor-teacher and existing deacons will investigate to see that the candidate meets the biblical qualifications.
 - 3. The leadership will observe him during a specified period of testing in order to determine whether or not he can perform at an acceptable level.
 - 4. When there is an opening on the board, or it becomes necessary to add a new deacon, the candidate will be contacted to see if they are interested in that position.
 - 5. If he is, his name will be submitted to the congregation who will vote on whether or not he is to be ordained.
 - 6. Church members should evaluate the individual based on biblical principles and not personality, relationship, friendship, or any other non-biblical factor.
 - 7. Once approved for the office by the leadership and the congregation, he will be formally ordained and assigned his duties.

8. Each deacon will serve until:
 - a. He resigns.
 - b. He dies.
 - c. He becomes disqualified by flagrant violation of the godliness code.
 - d. The leadership or the congregation loses confidence in him.

VI. The promise to the deacon for faithful service. I Tim. 3:13

- A. Two specific areas of blessing are promised to the deacon who faithfully executes the responsibilities of his office.
- B. Both are contingent upon the length of time in office and the quality of the service he renders to the congregation.
- C. The first has to do with his personal promotion in God's plan.
 1. This comes only to those who have served well in their office.
 2. It requires some time in the office; it is not a promise for the novice.
 3. It relates to temporal promotion in the deacon's personal life.
 4. Believers in the local church should recognize the value of a deacon's service and acknowledge him with the appropriate honor.
 5. Certainly, this promise relates to his future SG₃ rewards.
- D. The second area of blessing has to do with mental attitude confidence.
 1. During his years of service, the deacon will be confronted with situations and people that are problematic.
 2. He will be put under pressure to apply in the face of opposition, antagonism, being misunderstood, misrepresented, and even possibly resented.
 3. As he applies the principles of Bible doctrine and sticks to the straight and narrow, over time he will develop tremendous confidence in his mental attitude.
 4. He will observe first hand as God vindicates the principles of Bible doctrine and those that order their lives by them.
 5. Rather than being tentative and doubtful, he will exude great confidence.

VII. Concluding comments and observations.

- A. The office of deacon came into being as a direct result of the importance of the study/teach/ prayer routine.
- B. Deacons are responsible to alleviate the pastor-teacher from physical duties that competent believers can perform, which allows the pastor-teacher to function at his highest possible level.
- C. While each deacon is responsible for the particular area he is assigned, he certainly needs and must rely on other believers to aid him in fulfilling his responsibilities.
- D. Each member of the local church should familiarize himself/herself with the needs of the local church and seek to apply doctrine toward areas of need.
- E. Each deacon is to be aware that he has been delegated responsibility and authority to accomplish the tasks at hand; he is a servant of the congregation and pastor-teacher so that all can pursue MPR and fulfill the royal imperatives in an orderly fashion.
- F. The wife and family of a deacon are to support him in every way by encouraging him to fulfill the particulars of his niche; his family should also be attentive to the godliness code that is incumbent on them.
- G. Deacons are to set the example in attendance, Divine good production, isolation of the STA, reliability, patience and respectability to the members of the congregation.
- H. The attitude of the congregation toward the pastor-teacher and deacons is stated in I Thessalonians 5:12-13 and Hebrews. 13:7.
- I. All believers should regularly and consistently pray for their leaders.

