

DOCTRINE OF DEACONS

June 28, 1983

- I. The office of deacon is one of two offices authorized for the local church (1Tim.3:8-13).
 - A. The other is that of Pastor-Teacher (PT, 1Tim.3:17).
 - B. The office (elected by the local church) of deacon is not to be confused with whatever spiritual gifts (bestowed sovereignly by the Holy Spirit at salvation) a particular candidate may possess (see Doctrine of Spiritual Gifts).
 1. A deacon may possess any combination of gifts (except P-T).
 2. However, it would seem appropriate for a deacon to possess an administrative gift (1Cor.12:28).
 3. Other gifts that would be useful would be helps, exhortation, and evangelism.
 4. The mere possession of a particular gift does not mean a man is to be a deacon.
- II. Terms used in the New Testament to describe the office.
 - A. διάκονος, diakonos, from which we get the term "deacon".
 1. It is only used 3X with respect to the office (Phil.1:1; 1Tim.3:8,12).
 2. The verb διακονέω, diakoneo, is used 2X in connection with the function of deacon (1Tim.3:10,13).
 3. This word group has the general sense of "to minister" and is used for the P-T's function.
 - B. πρεσβύτερος, presbuteros, translated "elder", has a Jewish origin and suggests that a candidate should possess a measure of spiritual age.
 1. Even within a congregation of new converts, a Board should be selected based on spiritual discernment (cp. Act.14:23 "*And when they [Paul and team] had appointed [χειροτονέω, cheirotoneo; literally, "hand picked"; these individuals had only been saved a short time, yet Paul placed them in charge of the local churches] elders for them in every church [royal chain of command established], having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed*").
 2. This term is general for the spiritual leaders in a church, including the Pastor and the Board (Act. 15:2,4,6,22,23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; Ti1:5 "*For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order [aor.mid.subjunctive of ἐπιδιορθόω, epidiorthoo, a hapax meaning to set aright] that which is unfinished [churches in Crete lacked a formal and internal structure, i.e., a functioning chain of command] and appoint elders [aor.a.subj. καθίστημι, kathistemi] in every city as I have directed you*").
 3. The term is also used of the function of Pastor.
 - C. ἐπίσκοπος, episkopos: overseer, used 1X for a deacon (Ti.1:7).
 1. It is more often associated with the office of Pastor (Act.20:28; Phil.1:1 "*with the overseers and deacons*"; 1Tim.3:1,2, where it is distinguished from "deacon" in the chapter).
 2. Ti.1:5ff lumps together the qualifications of Pastors and deacons.
- III. Origin of the office of deacon (Act.6:16).
 - A. The office came into existence as a result of a need.
 1. The twelve apostles were administering the "helps" ministry.
 2. They were engaged in an essential ministry, but it was taking them away from their primary responsibility:
 3. Namely, the ministry of the Word.
 4. From this came the origin of the office.
 - B. The apostles brought the need before the church.
 1. They pointed out that an undesirable situation had arisen.
 2. They gave them a directive to select seven men to cover this ministry.
 3. This, they noted, would free them to devote themselves to praying, studying, and teaching.

4. They outlined the qualifications the seven deacons should possess.

C. The church responded to the leadership of the apostles.

1. They saw the spiritual issue at stake and responded immediately.

2. They sought out men who fulfilled the qualifications.

3. They picked seven men who were Greeks (Gentile deacons for a predominantly Hebrew group!) to diffuse the complaint of the Greeks (spiritual wisdom of the congregation).

4. They then brought the seven to the twelve for final approval.

5. The seven were then ordained.

6. The result is stated in vs.7.

D. The qualifications specified were:

1. A good reputation (a deacon must have credibility with those he serves).

2. Be filled with the Holy Spirit (he must maintain FHS, which gives him a spiritual dynamic; #1 above by itself is not enough).

3. Wisdom (a level of divine viewpoint, not only to know God's will on a wide range of subjects, but also to possess the discernment necessary to apply it to a given situation).

E. Observations.

1. Choose deacons according to needs as they arise in the local church.

2. The rationale for a deacon is to free the PT so his time can be devoted to the PT's most pressing responsibility (MPR).

3. The spiritual leadership, as well as the general congregation, should have a role in the selection process.

IV. Qualifications for those seeking the office (Act.6:3; 1Tim.3:8-12; Ti.1:6-9).

A. A man of good reputation among those in and out of the church (Act.6:3).

B. Spirit filled (especially when serving, Act.6:3).

C. Regular attendance in Bible classes (1Tim.3:9; Ti.1:9).

D. Dignity (take your work seriously, 1Tim.3:8).

E. Not given to excess in drinking (1Tim.3:8; Ti.1:6).

F. Not antiestablishment (Ti.1:6).

G. Loyal to one wife (1Tim.3:12; Ti.1:6).

H. Good managers of their children (1Tim.3:12; Ti.1:6).

I. Not engaged in dishonest monetary schemes (1Tim.3:8; Ti.1:7).

J. Having wives who are temperate and not verbal reversionists; faithful to the Doctrine of Sarah's Daughters (1Tim.3:11; 1Pet.3:16).

K. Hospitable (Ti.1:8).

L. Having a sense of fairness (Ti.1:8).

M. Having control of his temper (Ti.1:7).

N. Having control of his emotions (Ti.1:8).

O. Not a physical brawler (Ti.1:7).

P. One who associates with the right people (Ti.1:8).

Q. Males only (Act.6:3; 1Tim.2:12; 3:8; Ti.1:6).

V. Before a potential candidate is placed in the office, he should first be tested (1Tim.3:10 "*And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons being above reproach*").

A. Those who aspire to the office should let the local church know (cp. 1Tim.3:1).

B. Then they will undergo a period of observation and testing in which:

1. They will be assigned duties in their area of interest, expertise, and particular gifts.

2. They will be examined to see if they conform to the qualifications of point IV.

C. When an opening on the Board exists, each man will be contacted to see if he is interested in filling the slot.

D. If interested, he will be subject to the formal approval of the Pastor, deacons, and congregation, in that order. (Each party should accept or reject him based strictly on Biblical principles and not

personality. Where two or more men are interested and qualified for the same opening, the congregation will vote to determine the new deacon. He will then be formally ordained and assigned his new duties by the Board.)

E. Each deacon will continue to serve until:

1. He resigns.
2. Death.
3. He is disqualified due to violation of his oath.
4. He loses the confidence of the congregation.
5. He is replaced by a majority vote of the congregation.

VI. The promise given for faithful service (1Tim.3:13 "*For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high position* [καλὸν βαθμόν, kalon bathmon; it occurs once and was used of a rung on a ladder, a degree on a dial, and figuratively of status or position] *and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus*").

A. A high position (in God's plan):

1. Comes to those who have served well (καλώς, kalos) during their tenure.
2. Comes after so much time in grade.
3. Includes temporal promotion in his personal life (cp. 3Jn.2).
4. Especially relates to any surpassing grace blessings in Phase 3.

B. Great confidence (in the fact that Bible Doctrine works):

1. Involves the mental attitude dynamics of the deacon who applies Bible Doctrine to his decisions on the Board.
2. Each deacon will be put under pressure to apply in the face of opposition and contrary circumstances.
3. As he goes with grace and divine viewpoint over the years, he will develop a mental attitude of great confidence.
4. Rather than being tentative and doubtful, he will exude confidence.
5. This comes only after time served.

VII. Conclusion and summary.

- A. The congregation's attitude toward the Board of Deacons is stated in 1Thess.5:12,13 (familiarize yourself with the church's needs).
- B. The deacons are to remember that they are servants of the congregation so all can pursue MPR and carry out the royal imperatives in an orderly way.
- C. Deacons' wives are to be supportive of their husbands.
- D. Deacons are to see that the Pastor is free to study and teach.
- E. Deacons are to set an example in attendance, divine good, patience and isolation of the sinful trend of Adam, and dignity to the Royal Family.

PRAY CONTINUALLY FOR OUR BOARD MEMBERS AND
FIND OUT WHAT THE CHURCH'S NEEDS ARE.

Reviewed: April 21, 1988
Reviewed: March 19, 1995