



## Deacons (Brief Biblical Survey & Overview)

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*Philippians 1:1-2, 1 Timothy 3:8-13*

**THE DEACON** (Adapted from Redeemer Winston-Salem, NC materials)

### The Old Testament

There is no office of deacon in the Old Testament system, though the Levites often functioned in the same way that deacons end up functioning in the NT. And as we saw in the earlier section, we know that the leadership of the covenant community was responsible for both the word and deed ministry of Israel. Elders, prophets, priests, and kings were all responsible for deed ministry. In the PCA this is clear in our BCO—if there are no deacons in a church, then that responsibility is absorbed by the elders!

### The New Testament—Explicit

Philippians 1:1-2 & 1 Timothy 3:8-13

The New Testament has two explicit references to the office of deacons, Phil. 1:1 and 1 Tim 3:8-13. These passages clearly indicate that the office of deacon existed in New Testament times, but give no explicit description of the duties of deacons. It is clear from 1 Tim 3:8-13 and Phil 1:1 that deacons were officers of the apostolic church along with elders and that deacons were distinct from elders. The major distinction is that elders are required to be “apt to teach”—not required for deacons. We may get a clue of some the function of deacons by term diakonos which in general means ‘servant,’ ‘messenger,’ ‘courier,’ or ‘minister.’

### The New Testament [Implied?]

*2 And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “... 3 Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” ... 6 These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. Acts 6*

Some call this the first diaconate. Others are not sure that is accurate to see this passage as prescriptive of the office of deacon. They are not called deacons and they are commissioned by apostles—not elders. The ministry of two of these seven (Philip and Steven) is described to include a very diverse range of ministry including word and deed. For example, both preached in the immediately following chapters, leading some to believe that these were the first elders.

Some think it is right to look at them as a type of proto-officers with a diaconal bent. They function with a derived authority, in the manner, and for the end that our present diaconate does. I would see these seven as a good place to look for some of the early functions of a deacon.

**REDEEMER GOVERNMENT  
Deacons | Deaconesses | Pastors | Elders**

**NEW TESTAMENT DEACONS**

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*To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Philippians 1:1-2*

*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 on tables. Brothers, choose seven men among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. Acts 6:2-6*

*Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.*

1 Tim 3:8-13

**Conclusion About Deacons**

- Consistently associated with elders/overseers
- Appear to serve Elders and servant-lead church members
- The Seven shared responsibilities which apostles carried out
- The Seven led an organized deed ministry of the church, distinct but not excluding the ministry of the Word and Prayer.
- The Seven's coordinated and distributed resources.
- With no deacons, their function returns to the elders.

**Bottom Line | What's Most Clear!**

The deacons serve the church by taking burdens from the elders and helping them oversee the whole church.

## **DEACON HIGHLIGHTS FROM BCO 9**

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The office is one of sympathy and service, after the example of the Lord Jesus especially in their helping one another in time of need.

To discharge their duties the deacons under the supervision and authority of the Session:

### **MERCY**

- To minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress.
- To develop the grace of liberality (of resources) in the church.

### **FINANCE**

- To devise methods of collecting the gifts of the people.
- To distribute these gifts among the objects to which they are contributed
- To care for the property of the congregation, both real and personal.

### **BUILDING**

- To keep the church edifice and other buildings in proper repair. Good job, Marcus & Jen!

### **ORGANIZATION**

- The deacons shall be organized as a Board.
- It shall meet separately at least once a quarter.
- Keep a record of its proceedings and keep record of all funds and their distribution.
- Submit its minutes to the Session and meet in joint session with Session.
- Deacons may be appointed by the higher courts to serve on committees, especially as treasurers.

### **DIACONAL PLUMBLINES**

#### **To Free the Elders:**

“How can we help?”

#### **To Foster the Gifts of God’s people:**

“How can you help?”

#### **To Serve at Table:**

“Where is the practical need?”

#### **To Source the Vision:**

“What do we need to get there?”

**Everyone has gifts for the kingdom.**

*Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus. 1 Timothy 3:1-13*

**An Analysis of the Scripture:** (*Deacon qualifications are italicized*)

**Their family**

Husband of one wife Manage household well  
Keep children in control Children who believe  
*Good manager of children*

*Good manager of home Husband of one wife*

**Their reputation**

Beyond Reproach/blameless Not one who  
“lords” power. Respectable  
Not greedy  
Just  
Not contentious Not accused of rebellion  
Person of dignity Good reputation

**Their heart**

Willing/eager to serve Great examples Not  
overbearing Temperate  
Not quick tempered Prudent and sensible  
Hospitable Devout  
Not self-willed  
Not violent, but gentle Love what is good  
Free from love of money *Not fond of sordid  
gain Full of the Spirit Full of wisdom and faith  
Sincere*

**Their gifting**

Able to Teach

*Full of the Spirit Full of Wisdom Full of Faith*

**Their behavior**

Above Reproach Not addicted to wine Self-  
controlled Disciplined *Beyond reproach Not  
addicted to wine Not double-tongued*

**Their Doctrine**

Not a recent convert Holding firmly to the  
word

to exhort and refute

*Hold to mystery of faith*