

CARING FOR THE BRIDE

defining biblical roles in the local church

Sermon Follow Up Guide

Memory Verse:

Acts 6:3

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.

Prayer:

Be honored and make Your gospel known by the way our deacons serve the church well.

Reading Plan:

Monday: Acts 4

Tuesday: Acts 5

Wednesday: Acts 6

Thursday: Acts 7

Friday: Psalm 37

Saturday: Psalm 40

Sunday: Psalm 123

Song for the Week:

All the Poor and Powerless by All Sons and Daughters

Consider:

What does the word "deacon" mean?

Which passages in the Bible teach us about deacons?

Why is it important for deacons to set an example for the church and the world?

Do deacons have to be able to teach? Why or why not?

In what ways are deacons called to serve the church in scripture?

Discuss the meaning of verses 9-10.

What encouragement does verse 13 give for deacons to serve well?

Read Acts 6:1-6: How does this passage clarify the role of deacons?

Application:

I commit to live in a way that reflects Christ's design for me as a member of the local church.

I commit to pray for the lives and ministries of the deacons of our church.

Coming Next Week

The Necessity of the Blood of Christ

Exodus 12:13

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Sermon Notes

1 Timothy 3:8-13

“The Role of Deacons”

1. Deacons Set an _____
(1 Timothy 3:8-13, Acts 6:3)
2. Deacons Serve the _____ and _____ of the Church
(Acts 6:2-4,7)
3. Deacons Serve _____ of the Church
(Acts 6:1)
4. Deacons Work for _____
(Acts 6:1,5)

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1 Timothy 3:8-13

Acts 6:1-7

“The Role of Deacons”

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Benjamin Merkle, a professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, said, “Whereas the office of elder is often ignored in the modern church, the office of deacon is often misunderstood¹.” Our goal today is to understand the office of deacon biblically.

When you have a 2 year old, eating in restaurants can be a major struggle. 2 year olds are messy creatures. I can't help but feel sorry for our waiter when we leave because of the mess that Owen always leaves behind. We try to clean up after him and tip well. But it always comes back to the fact that, someone at Chili's gets paid to clean up after our 2 year old. It's not a glamorous job, it doesn't pay well, but it is what they signed up for. And it is a blessing to my wife and me.

The job of that waiter is a beautiful description of who a deacon is biblically. Church members are messy creatures. Our lives are messy. And as much as we try to clean up after ourselves, we aren't meant to do everything alone, and God gave us deacons to serve the congregation's needs. It's not a glamorous job, it doesn't pay at all, but it is what they signed up for. And it is a blessing to our congregation.

There are really only 2 passages of scripture that talk about deacons (1 Timothy 3:8-13 and Acts 6:1-7). So we'll be looking at both of them today.

Let's look together at 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

The first thing we should notice about the role of deacons is the way their primary role in church government is to set an example. Though there are some significant and notable differences, deacons are faced with a very similar list of qualifications as pastors.

- Dignified
- not double-tongued
- not addicted to much wine
- not greedy for dishonest gain
- must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience
- Their wives likewise must be dignified
 - not slanderers
 - but sober-minded
 - faithful in all things
- husband of one wife

¹ <https://www.9marks.org/article/biblical-qualifications-and-responsibilities-deacons/>

-managing their children and their own households well

Deacons are people we should be able to hold up to the congregation as examples of the faith. “This is what the Christian life should look like!”

Verse 10 goes as far as to say they should be tested before they serve: “And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.”

This isn't some useless office that churches create just to give some of their members something to do, the office of deacon is incredibly valuable and their role in the government of the church is indispensable. If the entirety of one passage of the two we have about deacons is about their character, we can know that their role is their character.

We can also learn that their role is dependent on their character. If deacons aren't dignified, if they are greedy, if they are double tongued, they will struggle to fulfill the other responsibilities their role demands. Verse 11 even includes the character of the wife. If a deacon is married, his wife is also held to this higher standard.

Verse 13 ends this paragraph with a glorious encouragement for these servants of the church when it says, “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.” Who would desire to subject themselves to servanthood? Those who see the current moment in light of eternity. Those who know they are storing up treasure in heaven. Paul promises a good standing and a great confidence in the faith! We can't help but see the connection to Proverbs 22:1 (A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold) in this verse. The role of deacon is one set aside for those with the wisdom to know that the stuff of this earth is worthless compared to what is eternal.

As we continue to look at the role of deacon, we need to look over to Acts 6:1-7.

You may have noticed that the word deacon was never used in this passage. That's significant. It may be useful to think of this group of seven men as proto-deacons. The reason we know they set the standard for deacons is that “distribution” in verse 1 and “serve” in verse 2 are greek roots that we get the word deacon from².

So this is really our best glimpse of the role of deacon in the NT. So what is the issue that brings them to this passage?

In the early church, the number of Christians were growing, but there was already division developing (funny how that seems to be a constant attack from the enemy). That division was caused by the Greek speaking widows not being treated as well as the Hebrew speaking women in the daily distribution of food. So the apostles (who were also functioning as elders/pastors³) called the congregation together in verse 2 and asked for help in this task.

We can see in the way that the apostles ask, that Deacons serve the purpose and theology of the church.

Look back at verse 2: “And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples (this is the congregation) and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. 3 Therefore, brothers, pick out from

² Bible Knowledge Commentary edited by John Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck

³ 1 Peter 5:1

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.”

What is the purpose of the church? At Lakeview, we summarize it “to know Christ and make Him known.” This is a reflection of the 1st and 2nd greatest commandments (to love God and to love others). The church accomplishes this purpose of loving God and loving others by the preaching of God’s Word and by caring for the needs of the community. In this passage, the deacons are called so that both of those things can happen.

By the deacons distributing food, the pastors can teach God’s Word and the community can be cared for. And as an added bonus, it protects the theology of the church. The service of deacons allows the pastors to devote themselves to study and understanding of sound doctrine.

Here again, waiters are a good comparison to deacons. There’s a reason why Cracker Barrel hires some people to cook and some people to serve. If the cooks were concerning themselves with getting the food to the people and clearing the tables, I’d be worried that the food wasn’t prepared cleanly or with care. It would take much longer for people to get what they needed. Truly, the food and the service would suffer.

It’s the same way in the church. God has given roles and order so that His church could do what it was designed for. That His church could do the work of ministry. Imagine how the purpose and theology of the church would be undermined if no one was caring for the needs of the congregation.

Which leads us to the third role of the deacons: deacons meet physical needs of the church.

It might be better to call this point 2.5 because it is so closely connected to protecting the the purpose and theology of the church.

The role of deacons to meet the physical needs of the church is both responsibility giving and responsibility limiting.

Meeting the physical needs of the congregation is responsibility giving because of the sacrifice it takes to serve the church. Deacons are real people with real families and real jobs and real interests. So every visit, every phone call, every event is time lost to their normal schedules. To be a deacon is to accept the responsibility of serving the needs of the congregation in a way that most church members do not.

Plus, looking at the example of Acts 6, there must be some administration involved in the position of deacon. The deacons already knew their task, but they were left to figure out how to accomplish fair food distribution. While we do see an example of pastoral leadership in this passage, we don’t see pastoral or congregational micromanagement. The deacons were appointed to their duty and they did it.

While meeting physical needs adds responsibility, it also limits responsibilities for the role of deacon. Notice how 1st Timothy 3 removes the qualification of teaching and caring for the church from the qualifications of deacons. Then, in Acts 6 the deacons don’t decide their task, they simply serve in the capacity the congregation needs of them.

In the Baptist church, it’s very common for there to be role confusion between the role of pastors and the role of deacons. Wayne Grudem notes this when he says, “It is significant that nowhere in the New Testament do deacons have ruling authority over the church as the elders do, nor are deacons ever required to be able to teach Scripture or

sound doctrine⁴.” Even in our own bylaws, you see Titus 1 (which is a passage about pastors) being used as the basis for qualifications for deacons.

As a matter of biblical faithfulness, we should aim to have two distinct offices for pastors and deacons. There will be some gray area in the work of pastors and deacons. As one writer said, “even things as ‘worldly’ as the building or the budget have highly spiritual dimensions in their administration.”⁵ But even then, we can understand the order the Bible gives in gray area. Whether we look at Phillipians 1:1 which lists, the Word of the Apostles, the congregation, the pastors, then the deacons. Or if we look at 1 Timothy where qualifications of pastors are listed before the qualifications of deacons. Or if we look to the number of NT passages that describe pastors as overseers and shepherds. The order is clearly established.

As a church, one of the best ways we can serve our deacons is by letting them serve us. Not asking them to be our directors or shepherds or elders. Their role in church government, according to Acts 6, is not so much to lead the church in decision making as much as it is to lead the church in service.

Naturally, though, as men are chosen that meet the qualifications of Acts 6:3 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13, pastors would be foolish not to seek their input and help. Deacons are selected because the church believes they are truly seeking after Christ. And as you have deacons involved in the daily lives of the congregation, meeting their physical needs, they will have a unique and important perspective on decisions that need to be made. So, while biblically deacons are not called to be the decision makers of the church, they are immensely important to advising and supporting decisions that the church makes.

This moves us to our last point today, which is that the role of deacon in church government is to work for unity.

As deacons set an example, as they protect the purpose of the church, and as they serve the physical needs, they are working for the unity of the church. That’s the whole issue here. The reason the proto-deacon is established in Acts 6 is because seeds of disunity were being sown in the early church. Bias was causing preferential treatment and God chose to use a group of men to end the bias and restore unity.

Acts 6 emphasizes the importance of unity in the local church. Verse 1 tells us that the number of disciples were growing. The gospel was taking hold where it was being preached. And almost like a villain from a fairy tale, disunity creeps in to stop what is good. If there is disunity within the church, it will be difficult for the congregation to look outside of itself. If there is disunity in the church, the momentum of gospel centeredness shifts towards self centeredness.

In working for unity, the deacons are restoring the ability of the church to do the work of ministry and restoring the design of a going and sharing church. Verse 7 shows us the result of a unified church being served by the seven proto-deacons. “And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”

That’s the goal! That’s what we want in our church. That’s what every Christian should want in every church. For God’s Word to increase! For people to come to Christ! For even the boldest deniers to become obedient to the faith!

And what allowed verse 7 to happen? The faithful service of a few men to meet the needs of the congregation.

⁴ Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine by Wayne Grudem

⁵ <https://www.9marks.org/article/deacons-shock-absorbers-and-servants/>

As a part of their role in church government, deacons must be unifiers. A deacon that causes disunity is like a fireman that starts fires. A deacon that causes disunity is only a deacon in name and not truly, not biblically a deacon.

I want to end with some encouragement. I believe in the men we have serving as deacons. I believe they desire to set an example, to protect the purpose and theology of the church, to meet the physical needs of the congregation, and to work for unity. If at any point you thought this wasn't true of our deacons, I can tell you that in my experience, over these last six months, it is true now. Thank you, deacons for your service to our congregation.

Ultimately, deacons will fail you. They're human. Pastors will fail you. We're human. We can look at the role of the congregation and pastors and deacons and we can do our best to fulfill God's call for us, but we cannot do it perfectly. The only one that can fulfill His role perfectly is Jesus Christ. In fact, He already has and continues to fulfill His role perfectly.

Jesus lived a life we couldn't live, He died a death that we deserved, and He rose again to break sin's curse. He is perfect in every way and He will never let you down. This morning, He is offering you eternal life. Will you accept His gift?