

# Qualifications for Church Leadership

1 TIMOTHY 3:1-13 (13)

## 1 TIMOTHY: DUTIES AND ORDER IN THE CHURCH, 1 Timothy 2:1-3:13 The Deacons of the Church, 1 Timothy 3:8-13

(1 Timothy 3:8-13) **Introduction:** this passage discusses the second officer of the church, the deacon. The office of deacon is so important that the qualifications required are just as high as those demanded of a minister or bishop. In this day and time, when worldliness, immorality, and lawlessness are running so rampant, the qualifications for deacons need to be studied, heeded, and guarded ever so diligently.

### A Call to Obedience for Shepherds and Deacons

Obedience to Scripture does not come naturally, yet it is the indispensable basis of Christian living and the basis for the local church's growth, direction, correction, and revival. I recognize that most deacons will resist change, especially if they hold a position of power. So I can only pray that the Holy Spirit of God will use the Word of God, accurately and thoroughly expounded, to affect needed change in the thinking of many deacons.

This teaching is also aimed at showing the shepherds of the church their need for deacons and their responsibilities toward them. For in order for deacons to do their work effectively, they need the guidance and support that only the shepherds of the church can provide. Unfortunately, many churches and their leaders are uncertain about the need for deacons. Some churches don't even have deacons.<sup>9</sup> Yet church shepherds today desperately need the deacons to relieve them from the many practical care needs essential to shepherding a flock so that the shepherds can attend more fully to teaching, guarding, and leading the whole flock. So I hope this teaching will help people think more biblically about the diaconate and become more willing to change church structures that are not biblically based.

Because this teaching is a biblical examination and exposition of all New Testament texts on deacons, I have not addressed many practical issues concerning the implementation and operation of the diaconate. Instead, I have prepared a separate guide manual to deal with these practical issues related to the implementation of a New Testament diaconate.

### Part One

#### Dividing Up The Work: Word And Deed

**Matthew 6:11 (NASB)**

<sup>11</sup> 'Give us this day our daily bread.

**James 1:27 (NASB)**

<sup>27</sup> Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world.

**Micah 6:8 (NASB)**

<sup>8</sup> He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, *to love kindness*, And to walk humbly with your God? (italics added).

**Galatians 2:9-10 (NASB)**

<sup>9</sup> and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we *might go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

<sup>10</sup> *They only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.*

### The Shepherds' Priorities: Word and Prayer

**Acts 6:1- (NASB)**

<sup>1</sup> Now at this time while the disciples were increasing *in number*, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic *Jews* against the *native* Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food.

<sup>2</sup> So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.

<sup>3</sup> "Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.

<sup>4</sup> "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

In terms of church leadership, [Acts 6](#) is one of the most significant passages in the New Testament and should be ranked alongside Paul's message to the Ephesian elders ([Acts 20:17–38](#)) for its relevance to church pastors. Church shepherds should read [Acts 6](#) every six months, for it is packed to overflowing with rich truths and dynamic lessons about church leadership and spiritual priorities. It emphasizes the centrality of the Word of God and the need to care for the poor. It addresses issues of conflict and problem solving, leadership character, finances, prayer, evangelism, love, humility, and community. It also directly addresses the subject of deacons.

In order to understand the role of the New Testament deacon, we must begin by understanding the shepherds' role in the church. In both places in Scripture where the title *deacon* appears, it is intimately associated with the shepherds of the church (see [Philippians 1:1](#); [1 Timothy 3:8–13](#)). [Acts 6](#), which does not actually mention the word *deacon*, reveals why the office of deacon was created. It resulted from a two-fold need: 1) to relieve the shepherds so that they can give priority time and attention to the Word and prayer, and 2) to provide official, responsible care for the physical welfare of needy believers.

The apostles themselves eloquently state the need for shepherds to be relieved of the many practical care needs of the congregation ([Acts 6:2, 4](#)). In [Acts 6:2](#) the apostles state the need negatively: "**It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.**" Then, in [Acts 6:4](#) the apostles state the need positively: "**But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.**"

Let's look carefully at these critically significant passages of Scripture. In this section we will expound the shepherds' priorities, for they are essential to understanding the role of the New Testament deacon.

In the following teaching we will explore the task given to the Seven, the forerunners to later deacons. We will conclude this section with a defense of [Acts 6](#) as the origin of the New Testament diaconate.

### Conflict Over The Poor

**"Now at this time while the disciples were increasing *in number*, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic *Jews* against the *native* Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food." [Acts 6:1- \(NASB\)](#)**

The apostles constituted the first official leadership body of the first Christian congregation. The Twelve, as Luke calls them, were the church's body of overseers or shepherds.

They were responsible not only for the teaching and overall pastoral oversight of the congregation, but also for the collection and distribution of the church's funds for the poor ([Acts 4:32-5:11](#)). These responsibilities soon proved to be overwhelming.

The church in Jerusalem was growing quickly. Of course this growth was good. The Spirit of God was mightily at work in Jerusalem, and many people were being converted. The church was not only growing in size, but its social character was changing. A great number of Hellenistic Jews began to enter the company of disciples. Hellenistic Jews were Greek-speaking Jews who had immigrated to Jerusalem from foreign lands and who were often culturally and ideologically broader in outlook than the Aramaic-speaking, Palestinian Jews. Because of these differences, the Hellenistic Jews naturally formed a socially distinct group. This made them somewhat suspect by the more conservative, "**native Hebrews,**" who were native-born, Aramaic-speaking Jews.

Despite the Christians' generous display of charity, a divisive problem arose among the Hellenistic and Hebrew believers. When it came to the distribution of funds or food, Hellenistic widows were repeatedly neglected. The Hebrew Christians, who were the more dominant group, controlled the funds, so the Hellenistic Jews started to grumble against them.

Here was the congregation's first big test of brotherly love. Could these Christians solve their cultural and attitudinal differences? Would their Christian love transcend age-old cultural and social prejudices, or would pride and fear cause division, as it so often does? Would the Holy Spirit of God be grieved by their fighting? Would their Christian witness be marred? Something had to be done or the church would split apart.