

# Qualifications for Church Leadership

1 TIMOTHY 3:1-13

(14)

## 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.

### The Apostles Take Action

Acts 6:2-4 (NASB)

<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."

Good leaders always distinguish themselves by their ability to skillfully confront troublesome issues and to be decisive. In fact, confronting problems is a major part of leadership responsibility. Fearful leaders who refuse to confront problems have demoralized many churches and organizations. Running away from problems creates worse problems. In this trying situation facing the Jerusalem church, the apostles acted decisively and skillfully. Their actions avoided a potential disaster and led to the creation of a better situation.

Summoning the congregation, the apostles first declared their frustration with the situation. They began by saying, "**It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.**" This does not mean the apostles disliked caring for widows, nor does it imply that they thought they were too important for such work. Not at all! They had truly learned from Jesus to be merciful and compassionate. For three years they had daily observed Jesus' burning compassion for the needy. From the first days after Pentecost, the apostles gladly served the poor and the sick (**Acts 4:34-37; Acts 5:16**). However, caring for poor and sick people was not the apostles' first, God-given priority. Indeed, caring for needy people could divert them from their primary responsibility of proclaiming the cross of Christ.

The apostles have no doubt about their calling. They are quite emphatic in saying, **“It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God.”** **“Desirable”** is the *New American Standard Bible*’s rendering of the Greek word *arestos* that often means **“pleasing”** (cf. [Acts 12:3](#)). However, the word **“pleasing”** in this context probably is better translated as **“right.”**

The apostles feel strongly about this matter. They know it is not right that they neglect preaching the Word in order to serve widows. Although caring for widows is important, the apostles know they must not allow even this honorable service to divert them from proclaiming and teaching the Word of the living God. That would be disastrous.

We all know we need food in order to live. That is why we expend so much energy to provide food for ourselves. Yet, most people don’t know that they also need the Word of God in order to live. In the Old Testament, Moses told Israel, **“... [God] let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know ... that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord”**([Deuteronomy 8:3](#)). Our Lord also said, **“Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give to you”** ([John 6:27](#)).

People cannot truly live without God’s Word. They cannot experience life as God intended it without believing the message of salvation through Jesus Christ. Nothing could be more important to the lost sons and daughters of Adam than God’s message of salvation. That is why it is imperative that the shepherds of God’s flock not neglect the Word.

Moreover, the local church cannot mature or be protected from its archenemy—the false teacher—without His Word, the bread of God. Therefore, it would be an incalculable loss for the apostles to neglect the preaching of God’s Word. To neglect preaching the Word would destroy the church in Jerusalem and deny the world the most significant message it could ever hear. The *New English Bible* expresses the apostles’ concern well: **“It would be a grave mistake for us to neglect the word of God in order to wait at table.”**

The need to teach God’s Word applies to shepherds of every age. **John Owen (1616–1683)**, the distinguished Puritan commentator, recognized the relevance of this principle: “The same care is still incumbent on the ordinary pastors and elders of the churches, so far as the execution of [charity] doth not interfere with their principle work and duty; from which those who understand it aright can spare but little of their time and strength (italics added).”

The shepherds of God’s blood-bought church must be willing to say with the same confidence as the apostles, **“It is not [right] ... to neglect the teaching of the Word of God to serve tables.”**

## A Clear focus on The Right Priorities

After their emphatic pronouncement that it was not right to neglect the teaching of God's Word, the apostles declare to the whole church their divinely appointed priorities: ' **“But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word”** ’ ([Acts 6:4](#)). Richard N. Longenecker, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, says the word **“devote” “connotes a steadfast and single-minded fidelity to a certain course of action.”** The apostles were on the right track: they were to steadfastly and singlemindedly give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word.

I am convinced that [Acts 6:4](#) is one of the most important verses in the New Testament for church shepherds. It enunciates the fundamental priorities of all church shepherds: **prayer and the ministry of the Word**. Church shepherds are so easily sidetracked. So many good things demand time and energy; there are always many people who need counsel, programs that need administering, and meetings to attend. Thus the shepherds' time for prayer, Bible study, and teaching the Word of God is slighted. A pastor of a small church told me it took him from Monday through Thursday to perform his administrative duties, which left only Friday and part of Saturday in which to prepare a message from the Word of God. My response was to encourage him to read [Acts 6](#) and reorder his priorities.

We must remember that the true priorities of church leaders are always under attack. There will always be too much to do. **“Overbusyness”** is destroying the lives of many servants of God as well as many churches. Robert and Julia Banks, a leading Australian couple involved in the home church movement, write: “The cult of busyness and activism that infects Christians so much today is one of the greatest barriers to the church becoming what it should be.” So church shepherds must radically insist on a schedule that affirms the spiritual priorities of prayer and the ministry of God's Word. The deacons of the church, also, need to fix these priorities firmly in their minds. This is what the apostles were doing in their pronouncement to the congregation.