

# Qualifications for Church Leadership

1 TIMOTHY 3:1-13 (28)

## 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.

### Missing Word, But Not Missing Concept

Although the word *diakonos*, the Greek word for *deacon*, does not appear in [Acts 6](#), the concept of an official body of servants who lovingly serve others does appear. Furthermore, although *diakonos* does not appear, its corresponding noun, *diakonia*, and verb, *diakoneo*, do. The noun and verb are used to describe the congregation's daily work of providing material help for needy widows.

- "... their widows were being overlooked in the *daily serving* [*diakonia*] of food" ([Acts 6:1b](#); *italics added*).
- "'It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve [*diakoneō*] tables' " ([Acts 6:2b](#); *italics added*).

Both the noun *diakonia* and verb *diakoneō* are used in the New Testament, not only in the sense of general service but in the narrower, even technical, sense of attending to people's bodily sufferings and material needs. Such is the case in [Acts 6](#).

The word *diakonos* is plainly used three times in the New Testament to refer to the holder of a specific office ([Philippians 1:1](#); [1 Timothy 3:8, 12](#)). It is quite likely that the official title *diakonos* corresponds to the specialized use of its related noun and verb: *diakonia* and *diakoneō*. Professor Charles E. B. Cranfield, emeritus professor of theology, University of Durham, England and author of the massive, two-volume commentary on Romans in the *International Critical Commentary* series, succinctly expresses this linguistic connection:

We have now seen that there is in the New Testament a specialized technical use of *diakonein* and *diakonia* to denote the practical service of those who are specially needy 'in body, or estate', and that it is highly probable that the specialized technical use of *diakonos* also has the same reference.

Therefore, since an office in the church called *diakonos* is concerned with the physical needs of the people ([1 Timothy 3:8–13](#)) and since an official body of men was appointed to help meet (*diakoneo*) the physical needs of the poor ([Acts 6:1–6](#)), we cannot but assume there is a connection between the two groups. The inclination to associate the church officers called “servants” (*diakonoi*) in [1 Timothy 3](#) with those whom the apostles appointed to “serve tables” (*diakoneō*) in [Acts 6](#) is quite natural. At the very least, the similarities should not be ignored.

If the apostles had appointed a body of men to “oversee” the spiritual life of the church so that they could travel, and if in the epistles there was a group called “overseers,” certainly we would assume that a connection existed between the two groups. In recording the story found in [Acts 6](#), what else could Luke have thought but that people would associate the Seven with deacons? That is precisely the conclusion of many Bible students during the past two thousand years.

In a sense, we should expect the Book of Acts to help us identify the deacons described in Paul’s epistles. The Book of Acts is, in the words of **F. F. Bruce**, “the second volume to a *History of Christian Origins*.” The diaconate is a distinctly Christian institution. People would want to know its origin. Furthermore, the Book of Acts is intended to provide vital background history concerning Paul’s teaching and personal practices. For instance, how else would we know that Paul appointed elders in many of the churches he had established? (See [Acts 14:23](#) and [Acts 20:17](#).) We wouldn’t. We need to read Acts and Paul’s letters together. The Bible is meant to be its best interpreter because the Holy Spirit of God divinely designed the whole of Scripture ([2 Timothy 3:16-17](#)).

### *The Personal Ministries of Stephen and Philip*

**Dr. Fee’s** second objection to [Acts 6](#) having any relationship to deacons is that the Seven were “**ministers of the Word among Greek-speaking Jews.**” In the same way, **Professor Hermann Wolfgang Beyer**, in his massive study on the Greek terms for *service*, writes, “It is to be noted, however, that the seven are set alongside the Twelve as representatives of the Hellenists, and that they take their place with the evangelists and apostles in disputing, preaching and baptizing. This fact shows that the origin of the diaconate is not to be found in [Act 6](#).”

Neither of these men can accept that such gifted men of the Word could have been deacons or prototype deacons. However, the fact that at least two of the seven (Stephen and Philip) were “**ministers of the Word among Greek-speaking Jews**” must not obscure *the undeniable truth that these giants of the Word became overseers of relief efforts*. That cannot be disputed, nor should it be ignored.

We must understand, however, that there is a difference between the personal gifts of Stephen and Philip—teaching, evangelism, working miracles—and the special task to which they were appointed, which was administrating the church’s charity for the poor. However, there is no incongruity between being a deacon and also being a competent

teacher of the Word. Furthermore, we do not know of any official responsibilities that Stephen or Philip held at this time. They were not burdened with the overall pastoral oversight and teaching of the whole church as the apostles were. Only later, after Philip leaves Jerusalem, does he give his full time to preaching the Word to the lost ([Acts 8:4-40](#)). At the time of [Acts 6](#), Philip and Stephen could, and did, serve as officers of charitable relief and at the same time teach.

The same is true in churches today. Gifted teachers with earned theological degrees may also serve as deacons. They may teach a Sunday school class or a Bible study in the church, but they do not desire to assume the full pastoral responsibilities of the church. They may hold an office related to serving tables and also teach because of their God-given gift of teaching. We must be cautious not to impose our ideas of deacons and church structure on the New Testament, for it gives us a great deal of latitude in these areas.

Another common error is to think that, because Stephen and Philip had a preaching ministry, part of a deacon's work is to preach and evangelize. **Michael Green**, professor at Regent College in Vancouver, Canada, writes:

It is difficult to decide whether Luke thinks of the Seven of [Acts 6](#) as the first Christian deacons. It would be very helpful if so; for it would tell us ... that their functions, besides being financial and administrative, involved preaching and disputing with the Jews, evangelism and the performance of wonders and miracles.

This is not true, however. Because Philip baptized people ([Acts 8](#)) does not mean that all deacons must baptize. Philip's baptizing of new converts was related to his evangelistic efforts, which he carried out after leaving Jerusalem where he served the church's widows for a certain period of time. The Seven were not chosen by the congregation and appointed by the apostles to teach. Rather, the Seven were commissioned as an official body of servants to the specific task of providing relief to the needy. By virtue of their God-given gifts some of them also taught.