

Qualifications for Church Leadership

1 TIMOTHY 3:1-13 (29)

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 New Organizational Structure

It is essential at this point that we not overlook the historical fact that the apostles created a new organizational structure in Jerusalem in order to address a critical, persistent issue: care for the needy. Prior to the writing of [Acts 6](#), only the twelve apostles held any recognizable office of authority ([Acts 1:25](#)). But now, two distinct groups become evident. The new group, an officially authorized body, is appointed to collect and distribute the church's alms to the poor.

There are enough similarities between [Acts 6](#) and the completion of the apostolate in [Acts 1](#) to suggest that the selection of the Seven established a new office in the church. (Read [Acts 1:12-26](#).) In the same way the apostles are named in [Acts 1:13, 26](#), the Seven are named in [Acts 6:5](#). Like the Twelve, the Seven have to meet specific qualifications before serving ([Acts 1:21-22](#)). Both groups have been appointed to clearly designated tasks. Finally, the laying on of the apostles' hands indicates authorization to serve in an official capacity. Therefore, this was not just volunteer work that was open to everyone in the community. It was an official position, open at that time to only seven men, for the purpose of collecting and distributing the church's money to its needy members.

Luke does not record what became of this official position in the Jerusalem church after persecution scattered many of the Hellenistic Jews ([Acts 8](#)). For that matter, Luke never again mentions the sharing of community goods, which he has done three times in the first six chapters of Acts. Such information gaps are the norm throughout the Book of Acts. However, there are no grounds to assume that the institution of the Seven soon disappeared because it was only meant to be a temporary solution to the special circumstances in Jerusalem. Although one theologian says, "Their office was unique and was not continued in the Church," the needy and the widows surely did not disappear from the church. They still required care.

A Good Model to Follow

No matter what happened to the Seven or to their position in the church at Jerusalem as a result of persecution, the apostles' act of forming an official body of servants to care for the needy was bound to have lasting influence. It was a great plan that met a common need, and people are always eager to adapt good ideas to meet their needs. Thus it is reasonable to assume that the Seven became at least a prototype of later deacons.

A little more than one hundred years ago, the **Anglican scholar, F. J. A. Hort (1828–1892)**, one of the most influential and brilliant biblical scholars of his day, commented:

The Seven at Jerusalem would of course be well known to St Paul and to many others outside Palestine, and it would not be strange if the idea propagated itself. Indeed analogous wants might well lead to analogous institutions.

As **Hort** says, “it would not be strange if the idea propagated itself.” The problem of helping needy people was common to all the early churches, so the plan implemented by the Twelve and the church at Jerusalem would have been an appealing model for other churches to copy. It would have been most natural for other churches to duplicate what the apostles did in Jerusalem. In fact, that is precisely what churches of similar history and theology do today. They follow (sometimes slavishly, to their own detriment) the practices of their original congregation and its leaders.

By **A.D. 62**, the office of deacon was a recognized position with an official title in at least two churches established by Paul. As “**a wise master builder**” and church foundation layer (**1 Corinthians 3:10**), Paul is the most likely person to have propagated the Jerusalem model and given it permanent, universal status among the Gentile churches. Paul was in Jerusalem when the Seven were chosen and would have had many reasons to duplicate the Jerusalem model. He was concerned about organizational matters in the local congregation (**Acts 14:23**; **1 Timothy 3:1–13**; **1 Timothy 5:17–25**; **Titus 1:5–9**). We know that he appointed a body of elders in most of the churches he planted (**Acts 14:23**), that he was deeply concerned about the poor (**Acts 24:17**; **Galatians 2:10**; **Romans 15:25–27**), and that he was concerned about certain uniform practices among the churches (**1 Corinthians 4:17**; **1 Corinthians 11:16**). By implementing the practices of the Jerusalem church in new churches, Paul could foster a visible link between the Jerusalem and Gentile churches as well as solve common organizational problems.

To be sure, the New Testament diaconate had a beginning of significant origin. Church history reveals that the diaconate was an intrinsic part of every church throughout the Roman Empire, even during the earliest days of second-century Christianity. How do we explain its widespread, deep-rooted, and persistent nature? What better explanation is there than **Acts 6** and the apostles' establishment of the Seven?

Whatever position one takes regarding the relationship between **Acts 6** and the later deacons, the concept of deacons, as derived from Paul's two letters, is not altered. The office-title of deacon (*diakonos*) conveys the idea of practical care and service to others.

Also, the fact that Scripture demands that deacons be morally qualified and examined before they serve ([1 Timothy 3:8-13](#)), tells us that their service would entail delicate matters of trust such as collecting and distributing the congregation's money and caring for people who have special needs.

Conspicuously absent in the deacon's list of requirements are the qualifications "**able to teach**" and "**hospitable,**" which are both required of overseer-elders ([1 Timothy 3:1-7](#)). This shows that the office of deacon does not include teaching or official church leadership. Furthermore, the deacons' close association with the overseers indicates that their ministries are complementary. The overseers govern and teach; the deacons help to meet the many practical needs of needy people. Thus deacons certainly cannot go wrong in exploring this passages' rich storehouse of divine truths.