

Qualifications for Deacons

What Deacons Do

The role of deacon in the New Testament is ambiguous. The word literally means "servant", but no further elaboration of the office is given. This word can also be translated "minister." Some argue that the deacons administered the physical needs of the church because of the example of the six men selected in Acts 6:1-6. While the word "deacon" is used in vs. 1 ("ministry" or "distribution"), and the verb form is used in vs. 2, ("to serve") the noun form is also used in vs. 4 to refer to the apostles proclamation ("ministry of the word"). Therefore, we have no reason to believe that the usage of diakonia in Acts 6 is a technical usage, or that the ministry of the deacon is limited to administration.

We think of deacons as "under-shepherds" who were responsible for shepherding a smaller sphere of the local church or other tasks as assigned, while the elders were responsible for the overall leadership of the church. Deacons appear to be under the authority of the elders. This is evident from the fact that they are always mentioned after the elders, and also because the requirements for deacons are slightly less strict than for elders.

Gender

Deacons were both male and female. While some say the "women" in 1 Tim. 3:11 are deacons' wives, this seems very unlikely. If Paul was concerned that deacons' wives be dignified so as to avoid reproaching deacons, it is unimaginable that he would not make the same point to the wives of elders. In addition, in Rom. 16:1,2, Paul tells us that Phoebe was a "deaconess" of the church in Cenchrea, and that she held a position of considerable influence.

Differences From Elders

The qualifications for deacons are very similar to those for elders, but omit certain requirements which are expected of elders. Evidently, deacons could be very young Christians (there is no "not a new convert" requirement). However, they were still to be "tested" to ascertain that their character and service were genuine and consistent. They do not seem to need as much scriptural knowledge as the elders. They are to "hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience," which stresses obedience to what they know more than a sophisticated knowledge of the Word. They are not required to be able to "refute those who contradict" as were elders.

Qualifications for Deacons

1 Tim. 3:8-12

The following qualifications are all of a subjective nature, and therefore must be understood as *comparatively* true for deacons, never as *absolutely* true. Also, we recognize that this is our particular interpretation, applicable to Xenos Fellowship. The English is taken from the NASB.

1. Dignity. "Likewise" means the foregoing description regarding elders applies in principle. Dignity speaks of a respectable reputation especially in spiritual matters.
2. Not double tongued means not insincere--not saying one thing to one and something different to another. Not a liar. Straight forward.
3. Not addicted to much wine means no abuse or dependence on any drug--may include regular use of alcohol even though not getting drunk, if inappropriate dependence is demonstrated. There should be a demonstrated freedom not to drink.
4. Not fond of sordid gain. Not willing to manipulate or resort to illegitimate means for personal gain, either for money or recognition, especially in the area of ministry. The person demonstrates a

proper values system, including a willingness to give up money making opportunities for the sake of the gospel. This also implies that the deacon should be giving consistently and sacrificially of his/her money.

5. Holding fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. "Holding fast" speaks of *knowing* the Word, and "clear conscience" speaks of *doing* the Word. This includes having a clear conscience with regard to the service being rendered to the church (i.e. sins of omission are also wrong).
6. Tested first and beyond reproach. Deacons must have a proven ability to do the work of shepherding and service effectively and without any grounds of accusation. In other words, we don't decide that someone is a deacon, we recognize that someone already is a deacon.
7. Not malicious gossips. They demonstrate care not to exaggerate or to abusively speak of others. This implies the ability to keep a secret where appropriate. If the failings of others are shared, it is only with those in a responsible position and for proper reasons.
8. Temperate comes from a word meaning serious, not given to excess, self-controlled and emotionally stable.
9. Faithful in all things indicates reliability. It implies that we don't have to worry when this person is given a job to do--the deacon will do his/her best.
10. Husband of one wife. Literally a "one-woman man," this means specifically that there is at most one person of the other sex in the deacon's life. It means in principle that the deacon has his/her sexuality resolved and under control.
11. One who manages his own household well. The primary application is to married men meaning that their family life is good. In the case of the unmarried, it means that they have close relationships and that those relationships are generally healthy and stable. A pattern of broken relationships suggests an inability to get along with others (especially your own family and friends) and disqualifies a would-be deacon.