

Deacons¹

Series: Our Life Together
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Introduction

- In our twenty years existence as Grace Community Church, we have never formally had deacons.
- Some have served informally in a deacon-like capacity; however, we have not called them deacons.
- However, the office of deacon is biblical and in recent years, we've begun to believe that formalizing a diaconate would help our church in a number of key ways.
- Your pastors have studied the scriptures and as well as a number of other resources.
- We've also talked to other churches and pastors.
- We want to gain as much as we can from the Scriptures, as well as from thoughtful and faithful resources around us.
- This message today is another step in the process of establishing a diaconate at GCC.

Main Theme: God strengthens the church by giving deacons to provide “logistical and material support”² so that the elders can focus on the Word and prayer.

I. What Are the Origins of the Office?

Acts 6:1–6

[1] Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. [2] And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. [3] Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. [4] But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” [5] And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. [6] These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. (ESV)

¹ This sermon draws liberally from a message given by Jeff Purswell (Dean of the SG Pastors College) on the topic of deacons.

² Phrase borrowed from “Why Elders”, p.96 by Benjamin L. Merkle

- The apostles (the elders) believed they could not give adequate attention caring for the widows and still maintain their primary commitment to the Word and to prayer.
- So seven men were chosen to help specifically with the temporal needs of the church.
- Notice the qualifications (v.3) of the men to be chosen – the concern was their character.
- This was an important moment in the life of the church, as the church was just beginning.
 - Not addressing these needs could have led to division, disunity
 - Not appointing men of character to oversee these duties could have made problems worse.
- So God was caring for the church by appointing these men of good character to address these needs, so that the Apostles could devote themselves to the ministry of the word and prayer.
- This is a helpful model for the diaconate today.
- Note: The Word “deacon” is not mentioned here in Acts 6, yet the concept is clearly there.

II. What Do Deacons Do?

- In a word, deacons serve!

“The word “deacon” (*diakonos*) simply means “servant” or “minister”. In one sense, all God’s people are called as “ministers” or “deacons.” However, there seems to be an official role for some to share that is designated with the title of “deacon.”³

- So at the heart of the office of deacon is a call to serve; to be active in service.
- Now, to be sure, deacons aren’t the only ones called to serve in the church. God calls all Christians to serve. Deacons excel at serving and help to coordinate service

Elder and Deacon – Distinct Roles

“Elders lead the church (I Tim 5:17, Titus 1:7, I Peter 5:1-2), teach and preach the Word (I Timothy 3:2, II Timothy 4:2, Titus 1:9), protect the church from false teachers (Acts 20:17, 28-31), exhort and admonish the saints in sound doctrine (I Tim 4:13, II Tim. 3:13-17, Titus 1:9), visit the sick and pray (James 5:14, Acts 6:4), and judge doctrinal issues (Acts 15:6). In biblical terminology, elders shepherd, oversee, lead, and care for the local church.”⁴

³ *Sovereign Grace Book of Church Order*, Section 10.1

⁴ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, p.16

- Elders are to be “able to teach”, literally “skillful in teaching.”
- Teaching is not a requirement of the deacon. A deacon can have that ability, but that is not their responsibility in the church.
- Deacons are also not called to govern the church
 - 1 Tim. 5:17 – “Let the elders who rule well” – governing well, overseeing well
 - 1Tim. 3:5 – speaking of the elders - “if someone does not know how to manage his own household well, how can he care for God’s church?”
- Therefore, the office of elder has a ruling function, a governing function in a way that the diaconate does not.
- Deacons likewise are not called to shepherd the church
 - To elders Paul speaks:
 - “Pay careful attention to yourselves and all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood.” Acts 20:28
 - “Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight...” 1 Peter 5:2
- The care of the flock of God is something to which the elders will one day stand before God and give an account
- “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.” James 3:1
- Though the work of deacons does provide very real, practical, helpful and necessary support to the work of ministry, they are not responsible for the souls of God’s people.
- Unlike elders, they will not give an account for they shepherded God’s flock
- So we’re aware of the general role of the elders – teaching, governing, shepherding the flock – but what do deacons do?

Deacons are called to service

- Deacons are called to serve and help to lead the church in serving.
- Deacons help care for the temporal needs of the Body.
- Deacons help support the work of ministry in a variety of practical and logistical ways.
- Deacons work for unity in the church and to help keep the week by week ministry of the church functioning.
- Deacons help to preserve pastoral ministry
 - The diaconate ministry reminds us that while the elders serve in a critical. role in the life of the church, they are limited just like the rest of us.

- So the deacon ministry helps elders to commit their primary time to the Word and prayer while other important ministry isn't neglected.

"It would seem, then, that the deacon office exists to assist the leadership of the church by relieving the elders of distractions and pressures that would divert them from the ministry of the Word and prayer and the general, visionary oversight of the church."⁵

- Deacons are dedicated to the advance of the gospel and the mission of the local Body.
- There are many ways deacons can help to lead in serving the church
 - Benevolence
 - Administration
 - Finances
 - Facilities
 - Logistics
 - This is not an exhaustive list, and there can be needs that emerge in a local congregation that emerge, just like they did in Acts 6, that deacons can give themselves to.
- The ministry of deacons will help our church be more fruitful and increase in effectiveness.

III. What Are The Qualifications for Deacons?

- Deacons must hold to the gospel with integrity, they must be proven, and they must be examples in home life.
- Leadership is called to live life that validates the truth of the Christian life.
 - That's certainly true of elders
 - It's also true of deacons
- Notice the focus here is not on gifts, but on character.
- The character of the deacon is so very important.
- It is possible to have a very gifted man whose character is lacking, which would hinder effective ministry.

Character Qualifications

- "Dignified" (1 Tim. 3:8)
- "Not double-tongued" (1 Tim. 3:8)
- "Not addicted to much wine" (1 Tim. 3:8)
- "Not greedy for dishonest gain" (1 Tim. 3:8)
- "Must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience" (1 Tim. 3:9)
- "Tested first...prove themselves blameless" (1 Tim. 3:10)

⁵ John Piper, *What Did Deacons Do?*

- “Husband of one wife” (1 Tim. 3:12)
- “Managing their children and their own households well” (1 Tim. 3:12)

On Deacon’s Wives

Reasons, from scripture, why we believe deacons are male

IV. Next Steps – What Does the Process Look Like For Us?

- Leadership Development / Deacon Training Group to begin in January.
- Install 2-3 Deacons in 2020 – Lord willing, more in the future as well.
- We welcome your input.

Questions For Discussion/Application:

- Re-read 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Acts 6:1-6.
- What is your understanding of the role of elder and the elder’s primary responsibilities?
- What is your understanding of the role of deacon and the deacon’s primary responsibilities?
- How can we be an encouragement and support to our pastors in their primary calling?
- How can deacons be a help to our church?
- Consider taking time to pray...
 - Pray for wisdom for our pastors as they lead us towards installing deacons.
 - That God would continue to raise up deacons in the years ahead to be a blessing to our church.