

Deacons

- This is the second church office that is still functional today.
- It is definitely distinguished from the office of bishop (elder, pastor) in Phil. 1:1.
 - Phil 1:1 – Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus: To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons.
- The diaconate is the office of service or ministry in the church; the person who so serves is called a “deacon” (Rom. 16:1-2; 1 Tim. 3:13).
- If the office of elder is dedicated to the work of teaching, leading, praying, and shepherding, then the diaconate is devoted to serving in all other areas of the church.



Deacons

- Deacon work should be ministry and concrete, committed service, not only short-term menial tasks.
- Since elders are focused on the teaching and shepherding side of things, it makes sense for the deacons to be leading the various ministries of the church under the elders.
- Commonly, the office of deacon is viewed as originating in Acts 6:1-7: the seven men who met the qualifications and were ordained by the apostles for the service of waiting on tables became the first deacons in the church.
 - The implication that is usually drawn from this decision is that deacons are to be involved in the physical and temporal needs of the church, while elders are to be devoted to spiritual matters.



Deacons

- The problem with that is deacons should not only be limited to physical needs. They do so much more.
- Not only that, it is an overstatement to say these 7 were the first deacons.
- The word “deacon” (διακονος; *diakonos*) does not occur in this passage, though both the cognate noun “service” or “ministry” (διακονια; *diakonia*) and the cognate verb “to minister” or “to serve” (διακονεω; *diakoneō*) do occur.
 - The Hellenist widows were being neglected in the “service” of food distribution (διακονια; *diakonia*; v. 1), and the apostles would not be deterred from their “ministry” of teaching the Word of God (διακονεω; *diakoneō*; v. 3).
 - This proves you can’t definitively say they were deacons from the word “service” or “ministry” alone. These words are applied to elders, lay persons, and deacons.
- Also, a closer look shows not long after, Stephen (Acts 6:8-7:60) and Philip (Acts 8:4-13; 26-40) were doing work not typical of what people would call “deacon’s work.”
- To say deacons do physical work and elders do spiritual work is an overstatement that says way more than Acts 6 actual says.

Deacons

- What are their qualifications? Let’s read the pertinent passage.
 - 1 Timothy 3:8-13 – Deacons, likewise, should be worthy of respect, not hypocritical, not drinking a lot of wine, not greedy for money,⁹ holding the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.¹⁰ They must also be tested first; if they prove blameless, then they can serve as deacons.¹¹ Wives, too, must be worthy of respect, not slanderers, self-controlled, faithful in everything.¹² Deacons are to be husbands of one wife, managing their children and their own households competently.¹³ For those who have served well as deacons acquire a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.



Deacons

- Paul begins his description of diaconal qualifications with some general characteristics of all servants, turns briefly to a specific discussion of women—either wives of deacons or deaconesses—and their qualifications, turns to the household requirements for male deacons, and concludes with a commendation for all servants of Jesus Christ.
- When compared with the list of qualifications for the office of elder, the list of qualifications for deacons has both similarities and differences.
 - Similarities: *dignified; not double-tongued*; deacons are to meet certain requirements regarding their families; they prohibited from being *addicted to much wine and greedy for dishonest gain*.
 - Differences: deacons do not have the requirement of being *able to teach* (1 Tim. 3:2); the association of teaching with elders or pastors of the church (1 Tim. 5:17; Eph. 4:11) implies that this ministry is not a primary responsibility of deacons.



Deacons

- This does not mean deacons cannot teach, it just means they don't have to.
- Though deacons, like elders, must prove their ability to manage their own households well (1 Tim. 3:4, 12), they are not given the responsibility *to take care of God's church* (1 Tim. 3:5), as are elders who lead the church.
 - The managerial abilities of deacons are to be directed toward *servicing well* (1 Tim. 3:13).
- Teaching, leading, praying, and shepherding are the responsibilities of the elders of the church.
 - Apparently, then, all other avenues of service in the church are available to deacons, who must *also be tested first* before they are allowed to *serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless*.
 - They must be serving, and they must be tested for their ability to serve. That is the nature of the test.



Deacons

- There is debate as to whether the office of deacon is for men only, or if it is also available to women. There are good arguments on both sides.
 - BTW, this is only reference to biblical deacons. We're not talking about churches with a solo pastor with a board of deacons. Those deacons function like an elder board. The following discussion doesn't apply to that.
- So the question is whether or not a deaconess is a biblical office.
- This debate comes down to 1 Tim 3:11.
 - Is it telling us about the character of the wives of deacons? Or of deaconesses?
 - 1 Tim 3:11 – Wives, too, must be worthy of respect, not slanderers, self-controlled, faithful in everything.
 - A plain reading in English makes it clear. Or does it?
 - Look at the same verse in NASB: "Women *must* likewise *be* dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things."



Deacons/Deaconesses

- Concerning 1 Tim 3:11, the opening word of this sentence (γυναίκα; *gunaikas*) can equally be translated as "their wives" (CSB, ESV, NIV, KJV, NKJV) and refer to the wives of deacons, or as "women" (NASB, RSV) and refer to women deacons or deaconesses.
- So which view is correct? It's hard to say. We must evaluate the arguments.
- Position One: Wives of deacons.
 - Paul is discussing at length (3:8-13) the office of deacon, and it would be highly unusual for him to interrupt his sustained discussion and switch to a new topic regarding women deacons.
 - We would expect more than one verse to be dedicated to such an important topic as women deacons; after all, Paul devotes seven verses to the office of elder (3:1-7) and nearly as many to the office of deacon (3:8-13).

D EACONESSES
IN THE CHURCH?

Deacons/Deaconesses

- Position One: Wives of deacons, continued.
 - The use of the word γυναικας in an earlier (yet textually close) context (3:2), as well as its use in the very next sentence (3:12), demands that it be understood as referring to “wives” (in 3:2, the “wives” of elders; in 3:12, the “wives” of deacons); thus, in keeping with the immediate context, the word should be understood as referring to the “wives” of deacons in this verse.
 - This is why the CSB & ESV inserts “their” wives. The possessive “their” is not in the Greek, but it is an interpretive decision.
 - If wives accompany their “deacon husbands” in their serving ministries, then it would be very appropriate for Paul to provide a short list of qualifications for “their wives.”
- In summary, interrupting the flow of his qualifications for deacons by inserting just a single statement about deaconesses seems forced, and the word γυναικας already meant wife when Paul was talking about elders.

DEACONESSES IN THE CHURCH?

Deacons/Deaconesses

- Position Two: Deaconesses.
- It is argued the structure of the chapter exegetically favors deaconesses rather than wives.
- In verse 11, the word translated “likewise” (the same word appears in verse 8 at the opening of Paul’s discussion of the office of deacon) directs our attention back to verse 2 to supply the verb that governs the entire discussion.
 - v. 2: elders “must be” (δει ειναι; *dei einai*)
 - v. 8: deacons “must be” (the Greek words *dei einai* are not found in v. 8, but is supplied in translations). The word “likewise” is a place holder for *dei einai*, so it supplies the verb. That is why the verb is not there.
 - v. 11: deaconesses “must be” (the Greek words *dei einai* are not found in v. 11, but is supplied in translations).
 - This structure indicates that Paul is listing and describing different groups: elders, deacons, and deaconesses.



Deacons/Deaconesses

- Position Two: Deaconesses continued.
- The list Paul supplies is like the other lists in the immediate context—it stands to reason that it is expressing the qualifications for a church office.
- There are strong parallels between this list for deaconesses and the list for deacons—both must be “dignified,” careful with their words, sober rather than addicted, and “faithful” to “the faith”—reinforce that this is a list of qualifications for women deacons.
 - What about the list being so short compared to the one for deacons?
 - Since Paul has already covered the similar qualifications for men deacons, he only needs a brief mention of the qualifications for female deacons.



Deacons/Deaconesses

- Position Two: Deaconesses continued.
- Had Paul wanted to indicate that he was talking about wives, he could have used a prepositional expression (wives “of deacons”) or personal pronoun (“their” wives).
- The absence of a list of qualifications for the wives of elders seems to favor the view that Paul is addressing deaconesses:
 - “It seems quite strange that he would give the requirements for wives of deacons but not the wives of elders, particularly because elders have more responsibility. But this problem is avoided if Paul refers here to deaconesses.” Dr. Thom Schreiner in a personal conversation with Dr. Gregg Allison.
- As for why Paul doesn’t just use the term “deaconesses” if he had meant “deaconesses,” the Greek feminine noun *diakonai* did not exist; thus, he used the generic word *gunaikas*.
 - The term will not be invented for a few hundred years.

DEACONS

Deacons/Deaconesses

- Both sides make good points. SWCC's current stance is the office is limited to males, but this is held loosely.
- Biblically speaking, here is what we can say.
 - If the deaconess is a biblical office, then like deacons, their office is complementary to elders.
 - They engage in all the other areas of service in the church: men's ministries, women's ministries, youth ministries, children's ministries, worship ministries, evangelism and missions, bereavement ministries, seniors ministries, singles ministries, sports ministries, fine arts ministries, mercy ministries (e.g., food, clothing, tutoring, medical aid), and more.

