

Are You a Deacon?

#3 in Series: *Let's Be Church*

Acts 6:1-6 (NASB)

¹Now at this time while the disciples were increasing *in number*, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic *Jews* (Jews who adopted the Gr language and much of Gr culture through acculturation) against the *native Hebrews*, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving *of food*. ² So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.

³ Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” ⁵ The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte (Gentile convert to Judaism) from Antioch. ⁶ And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

1 Timothy 3:8-13 (ESV)

⁸ Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued,^[a] not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. ⁹ They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. ¹¹ Their wives likewise^[b] must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. ¹² Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. ¹³ For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

There is a Church in Santa Fe, New Mexico that has a hand-lettered sign over the only door into the worship center that reads, “*Servants' Entrance*”. You can't enter or leave, except through the “servants' door” (Christianity

Today [9/16/91], p. 42).

That sign states an important truth – if you know Christ, you’re His servant. It’s not optional; it’s mandatory.

How we serve Christ will vary drastically... We serve Him according to the spiritual gifts that He has given us and the opportunities that come our way... Yet, it should be understood by all – that every Christian should have the mindset, “I am a servant (or a slave) of Jesus Christ”... There’s a difference between those terms, and yet Jesus used them interchangeably when He told His disciples –

Mark 10:42-45

⁴² Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. ⁴³ But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; ⁴⁴ and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Serving Christ is not volunteering – where you give a few hours here and there to help out... It’s a 24/7 calling...

Whatever you are doing or wherever you are serving – you are a servant of the Lord Who rescued you from eternal judgment... He saved you to serve Him always and forever...

But in the structure of the local church, some are called to be “official servants,” or “deacons.” “Deacon” is a transliteration of a Greek word meaning, “servant.”

In more than 100 New Testament uses of that word – in its various forms – almost always refer either to Christ or to His followers... Only a few refer to the office of deacon in the church (Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, 2:48-49).

So in our study of the church, we need to understand the role of all Christians as servants, but also what it means to be an official servant, or deacon... All Christians are servants of Christ; some should be “official servants”.

1. All Christians are to Exercise the VERB

All Christians are to *SERVE* Christ! There are no exceptions. If a person is a follower of Jesus Christ, he or she is Christ's servant... That's so because –

➤ Christ is our supreme example of servanthood

As we just saw ([Mark 10:45](#)), Jesus said, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

It's amazing that when God took on human flesh and came to this earth, He came as He did! God could have chosen for His Son to be born in Herod's palace, where He would have had the best of every worldly comfort – but instead – He chose a poor carpenter and his wife!... The Son of God grew up in a modest home where He learned the trade of His earthly father... His hands were not the soft hands of royalty, but the rough, callused hands of a carpenter.

It took the disciples a while to understand that Jesus, the Messiah, did not come at first to conquer all His enemies and establish His throne – with each of them sharing His power and glory... So, throughout the Gospels, we see them jockeying for power... It seems that James and John used their mother to ask Jesus that in His kingdom they might sit one on His right hand and one on His left... This caused the other disciples to become irate ([Matt. 20:20, 24](#)).

Even at the Last Supper, as Jesus was burdened about what He was facing the next day – the disciples were still arguing about which of them was the greatest ([Luke 22:23-24](#)). We don't know whether the argument erupted before or after Jesus took the basin and washed their feet (probably before), but Jesus repeated the lesson about the greatest being the servant and then added –

[Luke 22:27 \(NASB\)](#) “For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves.”

You would think that after Jesus comes in His glory and everyone is subject to His rule, He would shed the servant's role and demand that everyone serve Him... But when Jesus comes again, He says that He will have His followers recline at the table and He will wait on them ([Luke 12:37](#))!

Throughout eternity – Jesus is our supreme example of servanthood!... So –

➤ **Christlikeness means being a servant**

After washing the disciples' feet at the Last Supper, Jesus said –

[John 13:14-17 \(NASB\)](#)

“If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.”

We all know that Christlikeness means being a servant, but the question is, do we do it?

Do you wash dirty feet?... Do you do the unpleasant servant jobs?...

The word “[servant](#)” originally referred to those who served tables ([John 2:5, 9](#); [Acts 6:2](#)).

In that culture, such tasks were thought to be undignified... But Jesus set the counter-cultural example and calls us to follow Him...

It's important that we serve the Lord with the right motives...

Sometimes people serve because they like the praise that they get for doing it... Or – it makes them feel important or even superior to meet others' needs.

But the right reason to serve is to please the Lord who saved you when you were His enemy and only deserved His judgment!...

[] **Lorne Sanny** was the president of Navigators (a publisher of some very good discipleship materials) – once he was asked how can we know when we have a servant’s attitude... Sanny replied, “By how you act when you are treated like one”...

If you know Christ and you want to be like Him, you have to serve Him by serving others...

➤ **The Holy Spirit has gifted some especially to serve**

Paul mentions the spiritual gift of “helps” (1 Cor. 12:28) or “service” (Rom. 12:7).

Peter says –

1 Pet. 4:10 (NASB) “As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God”.

While all Christians must serve in various ways, God specially gifts some for service in supportive, practical, and often behind-the-scenes ways...

[] Those with the gift of service are like the linemen on a football team.

They don’t usually share the limelight with the quarterback, but without their hard work, the quarterback couldn’t begin to do his job.

Remember, whether service is your gift or not, all Christians are the Lord’s servants... That means we are to help with jobs that need to be done... If you see trash on the floor – and you are able – please pick it up and throw it away... Does the trash can need to be emptied? Carry it to the dumpster and put in a clean bag. Did someone dirty the rest room sink? Grab a paper towel and wipe it clean. Be willing to help clean up after Members’ Meeting and meals... just pitch in and help... Brothers – at home, does your wife need help? Get up and help her!

But beyond the service that we all should be doing ...

2. Some Christians are to Become the NOUN

Some Christians should serve in the official capacity of Deacon...

Note four things:

➤ **The office of deacon is recognized in Scripture**

Most scholars agree that the office of “**deacon**” finds its roots in **Acts 6:1-6**.

The church in Jerusalem had grown considerably. Apparently, there were many who came to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost – and when they were converted – they stayed there in order to grow in their new faith in Christ... This created many material needs and led to the temporary arrangement of pooling resources to meet the needs (**Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35**)... Many widows in the church without sufficient income were served daily meals.

But a problem arose when the Greek-speaking Jews felt that their widows were being neglected in favor of the native Hebrews... The apostles were concerned about becoming distracted from their primary responsibility – which was to focus on serving the Word to the church... so they told the church to select seven faithful men whom they could put in charge of the task...

We don't know why they stipulated seven men. Perhaps they decided that seven men could take care of the job. Although the word “**deacon**” is not used in **Acts 6**, it is generally agreed that these seven were the prototype deacons...

They were officially recognized and ordained for the job (**Acts 6:6**). They assisted the apostles by serving in the practical matter of organizing and leading in the distribution of the food in a fair manner – so that the apostles could focus on prayer and the ministry of the Word (**Acts 6:4**).

We know that it is a recognized office by the time Paul wrote to the Philippian church – because he addressed his letter to the **overseers and deacons** (**Phil. 1:1**).

Some have suggested that the Holy Spirit led Paul to mention the deacons because of their help with the financial gift that the church had sent to Paul...

In **1 Tim. 3**, Paul also mentions the offices of **elders and deacons**. In his letter to **Titus**, he mentions **elders**, but not deacons – perhaps indicating that the office of deacon is not mandatory for every church, but rather should emerge as the need arises...

So, how do we choose deacons?

➤ **Essential qualifications**

Deacons must be above reproach in their character and their home life.

We sometimes get the erroneous notion that the qualifications for deacons are not as high as those for elders... But in **Acts 6:3**, the men had to be “**of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom**”.

Except for being able to teach, the qualifications for deacons in **1 Tim. 3** are the same as those for elders... They must be spiritually mature men.

Again, in **1 Tim. 3**, Paul lists six **character** qualifications:

- First, a deacon must be a man of **dignity**. The word is the opposite of being a goof-off... A deacon should have a seriousness of purpose about him, so that those he serves sense that he is concerned for them, so that they trust and respect him.
- Second, a deacon must **not be double-tongued**. He cannot tell one person one thing, but another person the opposite in an attempt to please everyone... Since the deacon was involved in handling church finances, he had to be a man of his word.
- Third, a deacon must **not be addicted to much wine**. Since wine was commonly served as a gesture of hospitality, it was important for a deacon, making his rounds from house to house, to exercise control.

- Fourth a deacon must not be **fond of sordid gain**. The **ESV** translates, “**not greedy for dishonest gain**”. This is also a qualification for elders (**Titus 1:7**)... Since a deacon’s duties often involved the distribution of money and gifts to the needy, there was always the temptation for embezzlement... A deacon could not be a man who would pursue dishonest gain.
- Fifth, a deacon must **hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience**... The **NIV** renders that as “**deep truths of the faith**” – which can be is misleading... The “**mystery of the faith**” is Paul’s term for God’s revealed truth – especially the gospel... Mystery refers to that which once was hidden, but now has been revealed in Christ... A deacon must be a man of conviction regarding the central truths of the Christian faith... Paul’s reference to “**a clear conscience**” probably is in contrast to the false teachers in Ephesus, who had not kept a good conscience and as a result – suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith (**1 Tim. 1:19**).
- Sixth, a deacon **must first be tested and found to be above reproach**. “**Above reproach**” is used in **Titus 1:6-7** as a qualification for elders as well. It means – literally – “not called to account”... There is no legitimate charge that could be brought against him... This is to be determined by “**testing**,” which does not refer to a period of probation after he becomes a deacon... Rather, it means that a man has an observed track record before he is put into office... You don’t put a man into office and then test him to see if he’s trustworthy... Test him first and then recognize him.

Then Paul lists two ways deacons must be **above reproach in their home life**.

- First, (**1 Tim. 3:12**): “**Deacons must be husbands of only one wife**” This is the same as the requirement for elders. Some have translated it in its literal sense: “**a one-woman man**”. As we saw in the case of elders, the term refers to a man of moral purity... A deacon often

ministers to widows and single women, and so it's especially important for him to be a man who is pure in his heart, mind and actions.

- Second (1 Tim. 3:12): “Deacons must be ... good managers of their children and their own households”. This is also the same as the requirement for elders (1 Tim. 3:4)... The principle is the same: if a man can't manage matters in his home, don't promote him to manage matters in the church.

The wives of Deacons – have the responsibility to be godly and faithful in all things!...

In the middle of his discussion about deacons, Paul inserts a verse about “women” (NASB) (1 Tim. 3:11) (Most English translations renders the word “wives” – which is more accurate given the context)...

Paul mentions four qualities that must be true of the wives:

- First, they must be **dignified**. This is the same word used for deacons (1 Tim. 3:8)...
- Second, they **cannot be malicious gossips**. If they went from house to house with juicy tidbits of private information, they could quickly ruin a church. They must be able to control their tongues.
- Third, they must be **temperate** (the same as for elders in 1 Tim. 3:2). The word means, able to make sound judgments. It refers to someone who does not live by emotions, but by obedience to God's Word. If a person is swayed by their emotions, they will not be able to point people to God's truth... These wives need to be able to discern truth from error if she is to serve effectively.
- Fourth, they must be “**faithful in all things**”. They – like every leader – needs to be reliable.

What do deacons do in the church?

➤ The job-description of deacons

Simply stated – it is to serve the pastors and the church in the meeting of practical needs...

Paul never specifically mentions what deacons were supposed to do. But assuming that the seven men in [Acts 6](#) were prototype deacons – we can see some ways that they served...

- Their main job was to **free up the apostles** from administering the distribution of food to the Hellenistic widows so that the apostles could devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. So a main function of deacons is to take care of logistical tasks to free up the elders for prayer, teaching, and shepherding the flock...
- A second task of the deacons was to **care for the physical needs of the poor and needy in the church**. They probably assessed whether the needs were legitimate or not... They made sure that the help given was equitable.

The reward for deacons is a high standing and great confidence in the faith.

After listing the qualifications for those who serve in an official capacity, Paul lists the rewards –

1 Tim. 3:13 (NASB) “For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”

“**A high standing**” probably refers to respect in the church along with good standing in God’s sight...

Jesus humbled Himself by becoming a servant, and God highly exalted Him (Phil. 2:5-11)... The Lord also said –

Matt. 23:12 (NASB) “Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.”

The Lord will reward the person who humbles himself and serves faithfully as a deacon... Even if the church doesn't notice, God does.

“Great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus” could refer both to confidence before God and before people... A faithful servant can go boldly before the Lord in prayer, knowing that he has a clear conscience and is doing God's will. Also, such a person can have a quiet confidence in dealing with people, knowing firsthand the reality of the Christian faith.

But be forewarned: A lot of people have gotten involved serving the Lord only to get hurt!... Maybe someone criticized them or, people didn't appreciate what they were doing. So, they quit serving the Lord. In some cases, they dropped out of church altogether.

[] I read a story that was shared at a missions conference about a couple who had served in in South America for about 25 years as missionaries... Their primary task was to translate the Bible into a tribal language... During the process, they were teaching the Scriptures and a new church emerged among the tribe. But as they came toward the end of the translation project, the tribal people had become more and more involved in selling their crops for the drug trade and less and less interested in the Scriptures. When they finally finished the translation of the New Testament and held a dedication service, not even one person came!... The missionary wife was angry and bitter. She had given 25 of her life so that these people could have the Scriptures, but they didn't even care! As God dealt with her heart – through the ministry of her supervisors – she began to see things from God's perspective... She realized that she hadn't spent all those years primarily serving those people, but rather, serving the Lord. She came to see, “We did it for the Lord!” All of our service should be first and foremost for the Lord.

If the Lord has saved you, then you're His servant (= deacon), either unofficially or officially. If people appreciate your service, that's gratifying! But even if they don't, keep serving... You're not doing it ultimately for them, but for the Lord who came to serve and give His life as a ransom for you.