

UNDERSTANDING OUR ROLES 3

March 29, 2015

In our effort to be a unified work force for God in the world, we focus our attention on the office of deacons. Members of any group will benefit from the knowledge of exactly what the roles of each member are, and deacons are no exception. The work of any deacon becomes easier to manage if everybody understands what that work is. The office of deacon is one of two God ordained offices in the church today with the other, of course, being the eldership. Any congregation that is scripturally fully organized will have a plurality of elders and deacons.

Our word “deacon” comes from the Greek word διακονέω/ diakoneō, which means “to *be an attendant*, that is, *wait upon* (mentally or as a host, friend or [figuratively] teacher); technically to *act as a Christian deacon*: - (ad-) minister (unto), serve, use the office of a deacon” (Strong, G1247). In other words, deacons are special servants chosen by the eldership to help carry out the work of the church. Notice some very important things concerning deacons and their works.

First, deacons are not “Junior Elders.” Often, people view the office of deacon as a stepping stone to the eldership, however, the service of a deacon is an end in and of itself. True, many faithful deacons have gone on to become faithful elders, but that is a completely different office and work. One must never view a deacon that doesn’t become an elder as less than what he could be. Paul commended them when he said, “For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 3:13).

Second, the work of a deacon is not limited to only “physical” matters. Many believe that elders handle all the spiritual matters while the deacons “do the heavy lifting” so to speak. There is no such scriptural distinction found in the Bible. Deacons are assigned whatever duty the eldership finds them suitable to carry out whether that duty is of a physical or spiritual nature. A deacon can help a hurting member with spiritual counsel, as well as any other member if they have the aptitude to do it.

Third, deacons are not the only servants that the church has. The term “deacon” in reference to servants in general is applied to all Christians. When Jesus said, “**Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant**” (Mt. 20:25-27), the word “minister” is a form of the word deacon. The same is true when Paul told Timothy, “If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained” (1 Tim. 4:6). Every member of the Lord’s church is a servant!

Fourth, deacons need to be allowed to do the work they have been assigned. It is counterproductive when a person is told what to do and then not allowed to do it! Both the church and the leadership need to be patient with deacons and allow them to fulfill their duties as they serve. Also, it should not be necessary to “stand over the shoulder” of any deacon as he carries out his work. If a man has been deemed worthy to be a deacon, he is worthy to shoulder the necessary responsibility that has been placed in his care. Though I do not believe the servants of Acts 6 were deacons, it still serves as a great example of how a group of men were given a certain responsibility and then were allowed to carry it out in the way they saw fit (Acts 6:3).

Fifth, one of the qualifications often overlooked for a deacon, and elder alike, are their wives. Both office holders must be married **men**, Phoebe was not a deaconess (Rom. 16:1-2; cf. 1 Tim. 3:12). A deacon's wife must be a faithful Christian wife and mother, not a slanderer; she must be reverent, temperate, and faithful in all things. It is impossible to place a value on a faithful Christian wife, and that can be seen in the life of any deacon.

Deacons commit themselves to a level of service and accountability that surpasses most Christians. It is the duty of any congregation to encourage and support its deacons as they selflessly serve God in their works. In the words of Paul, we should "esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake" (1 Thess. 5:13). If one is called upon to serve as a deacon, he should do so with humility and reverence.