

DEACONS  
(The Function and Duties of Deacons)  
Lesson 18

**I. INTRODUCTION.**

A. Deacons in the Local Church (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8-13).

1. Deacons are closely related to the elders as they work together in the local church. A specific list of duties for the deacons is not given in the NT. Good deacons serve in whatever capacity they are needed and they adjust to meet the needs at hand. There is great flexibility in their work. Overall, a deacon must have a servant's heart.

B. Our Attitude Toward Deacons.

1. Many Christians have the same indifferent attitude toward deacons that they have toward elders. The function and duties of deacons are either ignored or they are made into something that is not Biblical. Let us not stress the importance of the eldership in a way that we neglect the importance of deacons. The work of deacons is important. Deacons should not be viewed as second-rate, "errand boys" for the elders.

**II. BIBLICAL TERMS FOR DEACONS.**

Note: The Greek and English word studies here are based on the King James Version. Other versions should be consulted which have slightly different words in the scriptures listed. The scriptures cited are limited to those which refer to local church servants (deacons).

A. Greek word — *diakonos* = "servant", "helper", "waiter", "attendant", "minister".

B. English translations.

1. Servant(s) (*diakonos*) = "servant" (seven passages in the NT).
2. Minister(s) (*diakonos*) = "servant" (eighteen passages in the NT).
3. Deacons (*diakonos*) = "servant of the local church" (Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 3:8, 12).

C. Notes.

1. There are different Greek words for "servant" in the NT. Two of them are *doulos*, meaning a bondservant or slave (the relationship to the master is emphasized), and *diakonos*, meaning a servant who executes the commands of a superior (the relationship to the work is emphasized).
2. Like the word "elder," the word "servant" (*diakonos*) is used in two ways: a) a general meaning — any "servant" or "minister" with no special set of qualifications; and, b) an official meaning— a "deacon" or special servant of the local church with a special set of qualifications. The context determines which meaning, general or special, is used.

3. The verb *diakoneo* means "serve" (used 36 times in the NT). This verb is used twice in connection with deacons in 1 Timothy 3:10, 13 where it is translated "office of a deacon" (KJV). There is no Greek word for "office" in the text. "Serve as deacons" is a better translation here, since the Greek word *diakoneo* is a verb. The noun *diakonia* means "service" (used 33 times in the NT).

### III. OBSERVATIONS ON THE BIBLICAL TERM "DEACON".

#### A. The Function of Deacons.

1. From the word study above, it is clear that the function of a deacon is to serve the members of the local church. Deacons should be careful not to let themselves merely maintain an honorary title, "office", or position. They have a function to perform; a work of service to do. Would there be any reason to have deacons who didn't have some work to do? No. The servants in Acts 6:1-6 were appointed to meet a specific need (Acts 6:3; "business" is from the Greek work *chreia*, meaning "necessity" or "need"). They were not appointed and then some work found for them to do later.
2. Deacons serve, but they do not have authority over the members beyond what the elders delegate to them. The denominational concept of "deacons" who function as a quasi-body of elders (decision-makers) is foreign to the NT. They are not an "official board of directors," nor are they "church administrators".

#### B. A Term Used in Plurality.

1. Like "elders", each time the Greek word *diakonos* is used for servants in the local church it is used in the plural (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8-13). There is to be a plurality of "deacons" in a local church, not one deacon.

#### C. Some Questions About Deacons.

1. Is there such a thing as an "office" of a deacon? Yes and No. Yes, if by "office" you mean the function or duty of deacons (service). No, if by "office" you mean a mere title or position. Review Lesson 12 II. B.
2. Is every Christian a "deacon" who performs work or service in a local church? No. "Deacon" is used in a special way in the NT to mean men qualified to perform specific duties under the oversight of the elders and appointed by the elders to do this work. Is a "deacon" in any way different from other members in the local church? Yes. See Philippians 1:1.
3. Do deacons automatically "move up" to become elders? Are they "junior elders" or "elders-in-training"? No.
4. Can a local church have deacons without elders? The NT is silent here. We have examples of deacons with elders present (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8-13), but no examples of deacons without elders. We must not act where the NT is silent.
5. How can a local church select and appoint deacons? The same way it can select and appoint elders. See Lesson 17.

6. How should Christians treat the deacons who serve them? All Christians should cooperate with the deacons as they do their best to serve. We should honor them (1 Tim. 3:13).
7. Are there women deacons (deaconesses) in the local church? No. This question will be answered in more detail in another lesson.

#### **IV. DUTIES OF DEACONS.**

- A. Specific Duties of Deacons Are Not Outlined in the NT, But the Nature of Their Work is Implied in the Word "Deacon".
- B. It is Not the Specific Duty of Deacons to:
  1. Preach — although servants like Stephen and Philip did preach later (Acts 6:5; 7:1ff; 8:4-5; 21:8).
  2. Oversee the local church — this duty belongs to the eldership. Deacons are under the oversight of the eldership because they are a part of "all the flock" (Acts 20:28). We should be careful not to say that the local church is governed "by the elders and deacons". Deacons should not try to "out vote" the elders. Deacons do not have an "equal voice" with the elders.
  3. Plan and perform duties not authorized in the New Testament.
- C. It is the Duty of Deacons to:
  1. Administer to the physical needs of the local church (Acts 6:1-6). Whether or not the men chosen in Acts 6:5 were "deacons" in the same sense as 1 Timothy 3:8-13 is still open to discussion. However, the main point is that we have an example of men being appointed specifically to assist with physical needs.
  2. A part of ministering to the physical needs of the local church would include ministering to the practical needs of the local church (the treasury, finances and budget, worship services, men's duty roster, building and yard maintenance, Bible class materials, the care of widows and other needy members, etc.)
  3. When deacons perform their important duties with zeal and proficiency, they relieve the elders from burdensome tasks that are essential to the local church's welfare. This allows the elders time to do important spiritual works (Acts 6:2, 4).

**V. CONCLUSION.** Deacons Perform the Important Function of Serving Members of the Local Church. This Is an Awesome Responsibility Not to Be Taken Lightly. Deacons Will Be Greatly Rewarded for Their Work (1 Tim. 3:13).

## Lesson Eighteen Discussion

1. What should our attitude be toward deacons in the local church?
2. What does the Greek word for deacon (*diakonos*) mean?
3. How many times is the Greek word *diakonos* translated "deacons"?
4. What is the basic function of deacons in the local church?
5. What important lessons can be learned about service from each verse of Acts 6:1-6?
6. Explain the denominational concept of "deacons".
7. T or F — A local church can have one deacon.
8. T or F — The "office of a deacon" refers to the function or duty (service) of a deacon.
9. T or F — All Christians can be "deacons" because all Christians serve members of the church.
10. T or F — There is no clear example in the NT of a local church with deacons, but no elders.
11. What are some duties that deacons can and cannot perform in the local church?
12. According to 1 Timothy 3:13, what reward can deacons have?